THE MOUSMÉ

W. MICHAEL KAYE
& EADE MONTEFIORE

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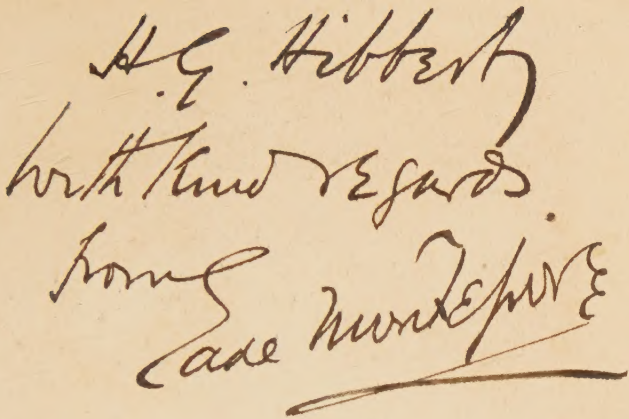
H. E. Hibbert
With kind regards
from
Jane Wordsworth

Miss Cicely Courtneidge
as Miyo Ko San

THE MOUSMÉ

A JAPANESE ROMANCE

BY

MICHAEL KAYE

Author of "The Cardinal's Past," "The Duke's Vengeance," etc.

AND

EADE MONTEFIORE

(FOUNDED ON THE MUSICAL PLAY BY ALEX. M. THOMPSON AND ROBERT COURTNEIDGE)

FRONTISPIECE BY H. M. BROCK

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Dedicated

BY THE AUTHORS

TO

CICELY COURTNEIDGE

AND

ROSALINE COURTNEIDGE

IN APPRECIATION OF

THEIR FATHER'S BEAUTIFUL PRODUCTION

AT

THE SHAFTESBURY THEATRE

LONDON

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ROMANCES

BY

MICHAEL W. KAYE

THE DUKE'S VENGEANCE

Dundee Courier.—"The book should prove a popular favourite among lovers of sensational romance. It has not a dull page."

THE CARDINAL'S PAST

Daily Chronicle.—"The story has the makings of a stirring romantic drama."

THE MOUSMÉ

CHAPTER I

THE SHRINE AT TSUMURA

JAPAN in springtime—with the glory of the cherry-blossom ablaze in every orchard, and the dream of love and sunshine weaving its magic spell over this sun-kissed island of the East, where tragedy—brooding deeply in volcanic depths—is forgotten in the laughter bubbling up from the child-hearts of its people, which never grow old with the years.

And where could the magic spell of romance be woven more entirely than on that green hill slope, crowned by its ancient Shinto temple—a simple, plain wooden building whither worshippers came crowding daily to pray—looking back into the annals of a past, dwelling on the brave deeds of noble ancestors, to brace them, who also were sons of Japan, for the present and future?

Far below stretched the blue-grey sheen of the ocean, tiny wavelets rushing in merry chasings towards the golden strip of shore. And yet, looking yonder, one touched unexpectedly on a tragic note

again, quite unlooked-for in a day-dream of singing-birds, flowers and sunshine. But there it lay—the great ship, black and grim on the peaceful waters, proclaiming to all who saw that the roll of war was echoing away to the west, and that the call had come to the sons of Japan to maintain their honour and their rights at the edge of the sword.

Already disdainful Russians were learning that their gallant little foe was not to be despised as they had thought at first, whilst all the civilized world watched, wondering and admiring, at a people whose endurance only matched intrepid bravery and resourcefulness.

Still, the appearance of that man-o'-war lying there, so inert and seemingly lifeless for the moment, scarcely marred the peace which surrounded that quiet hillside, where a single figure stood, erect and immobile, looking seawards with eyes filled by mystic reverie.

It was the temple priest Kieki San, dressed in his flowing robes, long strings of beads—not unlike a Catholic rosary—twined round his hands.

There was something sphinx-like in the expressionless face, and so still did the old man stand that a passer-by might easily have mistaken him for some carved image of stone.

Yet how wholly in keeping did he seem with the spot, impressive of that ancient worship of dead heroes.

A figure of the past—looking into the mists of the future. No wonder he stood still, silent, almost sorrowful, with deep thoughts floating over the mirror of his soul at the knowledge of the great

change which was beginning to creep over the people of his land.

To the old priest of the Shinto temple change was a sorrowful thing, and too great for his simple mind to understand. Had he not lived all his life in the spirit-chambers of the dead?

A burst of merry laughter, and the spell of a day-dream was broken, as up the slope came a little group of three or four young girls. Mousmé—or unmarried maids of Japan were these, duly chaperoned by an elderly woman, as befitted those of higher rank. All passed the old priest with a word of greeting, on their way up to the temple, only the youngest and prettiest paused, coming a step towards him.

"Is Hana in the temple, O Kieki San?" she asked.

The priest turned to look, and smiled as he saw who his questioner was.

A slim little mousmé, scarcely more than fifteen years old, in dainty kimono of white and mauve, heliotrope blossoms in her fair hair, whilst the eyes which peeped roguishly up into the time-worn old face were blue as the purple iris of summer.

Here was a beauty which had nothing typically Japanese about it, a fact explained easily enough, since O Miyo San, the spoilt little daughter of stern old General Okubo, had once possessed an English mother, as fair and blue-eyed as herself, though five summers had passed since those blue eyes had closed for ever, leaving behind a memory as sweet to her husband's heart as cherry-bloom in spring-tide, and a dainty miniature of herself who had

done her best ever since to tyrannize over an adoring father, thus proving the truth of having Western blood in her veins.

But, for all her wilfulness, none could help loving the little Miyo, who was as playful as a kitten and as dainty and sweet as one of the sacred pigeons of the temple court.

She repeated her question now, twirling a violet and white parasol over her head.

And the priest smiled again in answering—

"Yes, O Miyo San. Hana is in the temple. She will be glad to see you."

"And there is so much I have to say," nodded the little Miyo, with a skip forward. "Fancy, Kieki, the soldiers are going to-day, and—and——" But the rest of her confession was not for the dull ears of an old priest who had spent so much time in the spirit-chambers worshipping the souls of honourable ancestors that he must long ago have forgotten the meaning of such words as love and sunshine.

So Miyo climbed the steps leading to the temple in search of her childhood's friend, the gentle O Hana San, who had become a holy miko, or singing nun of the temple, bringing constant crowds of pilgrims, who heard of her fame as a songster from afar.

But Miyo had not come to hear Hana sing—she preferred that she shouid rest, quite quietly, under the shade of the dwarf pines which grew round the outer court of the temple, listening whilst she, Miyo, explained to her all that she meant to do with her life, which was *not* going to be spent like

that of the rest of her countrywomen in just doing what her husband desired.

"But what will Makei say to that?" asked Hana, a slender, dreamy-eyed maid, whose black hair framed a tender little face which was stamped by an expression of sweet gravity and goodness. "What will Makei say?"

Miyo shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't care a fig for my cousin Makei," she declared.

But a dimple lurked in a smooth cheek as she spoke, whilst presently a graver look dawned in laughing eyes.

"I hate wars," she said inconsequently. "And I wish I could go and kill the Russians. Oh, Hana! what shall we do if—if they don't come back?"

Hana's arm was twined round the other's waist. It was the hour of confidences, and from where they sat they could not see the black outline of the man-o'-war, whose decks were alive now with swarming figures.

On the slope below the priest had turned to enter a tiny cottage, yet he had scarcely closed the shoji before a sound floated up from the foot of the hill.

It was the song of pilgrims ascending towards the shrine—a sweet, elusive chant, blending and mingling with the soft voices of nature. It would have needed only that to complete the spell of old Kieki's dream—but the dream had been broken already.

Nearer and nearer came the echo of the pilgrim song, whilst from between the dwarf pines an old

woman's bowed form was seen approaching, a little child walking sedately beside her, clutching at her dress, a quaint, black-eyed toddler, with shaven crown and odd solemnity of expression which was changed to smiling rapture as, loosening his hold, he darted forward to pluck a flower near.

His grandmother, nothing heeding, bent over the washing-trough and began to wash her wrinkled hands, crooning a melody under her breath. The song of the pilgrims was inspiring—and was not she, too, on her way to pray?

The child, finding other small companions approaching through the trees of the wooded slope, trotted off, clapping joyous hands. Was it not time for play—since the sun shone? In all the world there are no children so happy as those of Japan, for it is a world made for them apparently, and the days long joys of play-hours and laughter.

But the old woman, having finished her ablutions, stood bowing to greet the weary throng of pilgrims who came crowding forward, eager to reach their journey's end. Yet they paused by the washing-trough, giving her greeting—

"O Hayo, O Ba San."

There was much bowing over the salutation, whilst the dust-laden pilgrims gazed round curiously.

"Is this the shrine where dwells the holy mousmé?" asked one.

"More than a score of miles have I tramped to seek her blessing," sighed a second, "for my son now departing for the wars."

The old woman nodded.

"If your honourable sons have received the blessing of His Majesty the Emperor, no other blessing shall they need," she piped in a shrill voice. "But here is the holy priest." She fell on her knees as she spoke, whilst the pilgrims hastened to prostrate themselves before the old man who stood on the threshold of the cottage.

He looked at them thoughtfully, with that curiously detached manner which seemed to suggest an effort in concentrating his mind on the present. Yet he spoke kindly and gently—

"May your six senses be pure and the honourable weather fine," he gave them greeting. "Come, enter the shrine."

He pointed towards the well-worn steps leading to the hill-summit.

The pilgrims lost no time in scrambling to their feet and hastening to obey. But one—he who was so anxious for blessings on his son—lingered.

"Most holy and most reverend," he began dubiously, "shall we hear the chant of the holy Bird-Maiden?"

The priest smiled. Praise for Hana was the surest way to win his heart.

"Aye, aye," he replied, "you shall hear her whose voice is as bird-song bursting from the gentle soul of a woman. Go up; you shall not be disappointed."

He waved them forward, ready to follow himself, when the sound of another voice arrested him.

"Kieki San!"

He turned eagerly to greet one who was an old friend.

Behind him stood General Okubo, with two younger officers by his side.

It was a meeting which recalled that subtle note of tragedy which had jarred on the priest as he looked across a smiling ocean and saw the black hulk of a man-o'-war.

No longer might their Japan be called the land of the Great Peace.

Yet he did not blame these men, who went forth to fight for their country's honour. Were not these to prove the teaching which dead heroes preached?

"General Okubo!" he murmured, and smiled that slow, welcoming smile of his.

The General and his officers saluted gravely.

"Is my little Miyo here?" asked the former, and his voice grew soft over the question.

Kieki inclined his head.

"The honourable mousmé arrived some time since. She is with Hana, as is her wont."

The General looked pleased.

"Good," he said heartily. "Miyo is a madcap, but Hana is a saint. I am glad to think that in my absence they will look after each other."

He paused, stroking his small, pointed beard. The leaving of this only child of his was no light task, though he took care to mask his deeper feelings.

In the pause the elder of the two officers moved a step forward. A tall, black-eyed man was this, with narrow jaw and a furtive look which gave an instant impression of distrust. Rich and lavish as he might be in his regiment, Captain Yamaki

would never be a favourite amongst his brother officers, however cleverly he dissimulated before his General.

At the present moment he was congratulating himself on a master-stroke which promised to establish him in the latter's favour.

"May I remind your Excellency," he murmured, "that I have not yet had the felicity to meet your honourable daughter."

The second officer, Lieutenant Ito, started, glancing at him suspiciously. Yamaki returned his stare with the suavest of smiles, which for some unaccountable reason sent the younger man pacing off in obvious search of self-control.

The General frowned.

"Time enough to speak of the child's marriage after the war," he said abruptly; then, more amiably to Kieki, whilst laying his hand on Yamaki's arm, "I must tell you," he went on, "that Captain Yamaki's father has done me the honour to propose a *mi-ai* between his son and my little girl."

The priest did not answer; perhaps as he looked long and steadily into that crafty face and noted the shifting expression of the black eyes he grew pitiful for the pretty little mousmé in her mauve and white daintiness, who had stood twirling her paper parasol over her fair head and laughing up at him with all the roguish merriment of a child.

Poor little Miyo San! There would be little laughter left in life if it had to be spent as the wife of Captain Yamaki.

So he made no reply to his old friend's announcement, but stood with hands buried in the folds of

his long sleeves, whilst the General turned to Yamaki.

"Where is Fujiwara?" he asked. "He must be told of our immediate departure."

It was curious how cleverly-raised eyebrows and faintly-shrugged shoulders left a defamatory suggestion behind as to the whereabouts of the younger officer.

But, before the General could repeat his question, Lieutenant Ito interrupted.

"Your pardon, sir. Captain Fujiwara is approaching."

Yamaki drew back, scowling—one did not need to have his feelings towards this junior officer expressed in words.

Ever since young Fujiwara had entered the regiment he and his senior officer, Captain Yamaki, had been rivals, and the feeling of latent animosity had been quickened only last night into something approaching an open quarrel.

Kieki San, standing aside, watchful yet observant, drew his own conclusions. Even in the hushed silence of spirit-chambers it is possible to acquire the gift of character reading. And these two before him were not difficult studies.

Yamaki, scheming, unprincipled, clever and ambitious. Fujiwara, honourable and high-minded, his handsome face lighted by the generous, joyous-hearted nature within. Moreover, he was an enthusiast before whom the future lay sun-lit in glorious beauty, where love inspired desire for renown, so that the lesser ambition might be sacrificed at the shrine of life's greatest glory.

He had found that last in the eyes of O Hana San, the holy maid of this peaceful shrine.

No wonder he smiled now as he stood there, eager, alert, his heart stirred by sweetest emotion, his whole being crying out the demand that he might prove himself worthy of a gift which he had begun to hope might indeed be bestowed on him.

"Eh?" quoth the General, peering forward, for he was near-sighted without his glasses. "Ah, there he is. Fujiwara, we shall probably sail with the tide."

His tones were genial, for the young man he addressed was a favourite of his and had already won a high place in his esteem.

"Sail with the tide?" cried Fujiwara eagerly. "Banzai!"

There was no mistaking his pleasure, though its source might still be a secret.

"You are eager?" questioned Okubo. It pleased him to see an enthusiasm matching his own.

"I am ready, sir," replied Fujiwara, laying his hand on his sword and bowing respectfully, but the eyes which sparkled with a hundred tales of ambition spoke more eloquently.

"Let the men say good-bye to their wives and sweethearts," commanded the General. "By the way, I passed the Tea-house late last night—saw lights, heard the shrill voices of women mingled with sounds of wrangling. Make inquiries, Fujiwara, and if there has been any drunkenness, let the culprits be punished. Come, Kieki."

With his hand resting on the priest's arm, the General passed up the steps to the temple. It was

to be the solemn hour of prayer for victory over a fierce enemy—a prayer which rose up from the lips of every son of Japan in those grim days of war.

But, though yonder the spirit of peace and dreamy silence might cling around the ancient building of worship, there was little of it left behind on the spot the two men had quitted.

Fujiwara stood staring after the retreating figures, his face grown strangely pale, his eyes saddened by misgiving and self-reproach.

"Goddess of Mercy!" he groaned. "If he knew . . . that *I* betrayed his trust, . . . that *I* forgot my duty. That——"

His hands fell to his side, his chin sank forward on his chest in an attitude of deep dejection.

"That I——" he muttered. "That I——" He did not notice that Captain Yamaki was by his side.

CHAPTER II

MIYO SAN ASSERTS HERSELF

A SNEERING laugh broke in on a melancholy reverie. Captain Yamaki's face was not pleasant to see at that moment of evil triumph.

"Goddess of Mercy," he mocked, "and what would General Okubo say if he knew that his favourite lost money at cards and was insolent to his senior officer?"

Fujiwara sprang back—dejection giving place to indignation.

"It was the words you spoke of Hana that——"

Yamaki raised his hand. The mocking devil in his eyes would have aroused the other to fury did not fear at his own impotence urge caution.

"I recollect," Yamaki replied suavely. "Now, if you'll allow me to pass, I'll say good-bye to her."

For a moment Fujiwara hesitated, barring the way up the narrow steps. But he dared not disobey. Yamaki was his superior—and in a few hours they would be embarking for active service. Yet his voice was husky in its pleading.

"Honourably please to remember; Hana is as a child, knowing nothing of guile or sin. I ask you not to see her again."

There was a brief second of suspense—not of hesitation. Yamaki did not waver in his resolve, but he would not deprive himself of the pleasure of witnessing his rival's pain. And he knew himself to be doubly master of the situation.

As Fujiwara moved aside he stepped forward, pausing half-way up the steps to look back at the man who stood looking after him torn by conflicting emotions, the stronger of which urged immediate resistance to the other's purpose.

"You will do better, my friend," he cried softly, "not to meddle in my affairs. By the way, three thousand yen I think you owe me."

He mounted, laughing, knowing that the taunt would not be without its effect. So pleased was he in his petty triumph that he inadvertently collided with the lad in lieutenant's uniform who was descending by the same path.

Easily irritated, he scowled round at the offender.

"Out of the way!" he snarled. "Out of the way!"

The lad bit his lip, flushing angrily—but he waited till Yamaki was out of earshot before giving vent to his spleen—the honourable Captain having an unpleasantly retentive memory for breaches of etiquette.

"Offensive upstart," he burst forth, as soon, however, as Yamaki had disappeared round a spur of the hill. "What is the matter with him, Fujiwara?"

The young Captain, who was pacing restlessly to and fro across the little plateau in front of the cottage came to a stop before the inquirer.

"The matter?" he queried. "Did you ask what was the matter, Makei?"

Makei wrinkled up an expressive and ugly little physiognomy into a grimace.

"The — ahem — *honourable* Captain Yamaki appears to have an indigestion," said he.

Fujiwara came back from a troubled memory to a still more troublous present.

"He's just reminded me that I lost money to him last night," he replied, with a groan. "Money, Makei, which he knows I can't pay."

Makei rose on his toes, as though desirous of making the most of diminutive stature, whilst puffing out a finely padded chest with a magnificent display of scorn.

"That's like him," he cried, crowing his scorn like any irate bantam. "That's Yamaki to the life. O—oh, if I were his honourable superior officer——" He shook his clenched fist, as though striking an imaginary enemy.

At any other time Fujiwara would have laughed at the little man's display of rage; as it was he only sighed.

"He gave a dinner-party," he continued; "I was a fool to go under the circumstances. You know the sort of entertainment he loves to indulge in."

"Yes, yes," nodded Makei, "I know his vulgar pride."

"There were women—geisha—lots of wine. And afterwards cards. I ought not to have joined, but when I hesitated he taunted me about my poverty, shaming me before his guests. I don't excuse myself, Makei. I should have been a man. But

—I failed. I joined the play, and lost money, far more than I could afford—far more than I have to pay at present. Then, to crown all, he proposed a toast, in shameful words, to Hana San, the temple singing-maid."

Makei gave a swift glance into the speaker's face and looked away again. His cousin Miyo had mentioned the names of Fujiwara and O Hana San in a moment of confidence.

The strained look of pain on the former's face as he spoke those last words confirmed the child's guess.

"And you?" asked Makei.

"I threw my wine in his face," replied Fujiwara fiercely.

Makei walked slowly and deliberately the length of the plateau and then back again, halting before his friend.

"If he can stab you in the back," said he gravely, "be sure he will do it. Take care of yourself, Fujiwara, after this. He knows how to hate, that devil Yamaki—and he certainly hates us two."

Fujiwara shrugged his shoulders.

"Us?" he emphasized. "And why include yourself, my little Makei?"

Makei folded his arms impressively. "Because you are a Samurai, while he is only the son of a fraudulent Army Contractor. As for me, he is jealous because—well, he dares to aspire to the hand of my little cousin Miyo."

The boy—he was little more for all his mighty self-importance—had so contemptuous an air of

superiority that Fujiwara could not but smile in spite of his trouble.

"Ah," said he, trying to banish the disturbing thoughts which Yamaki's threats had roused. "By the way, who is to look after Miyo while you are slaughtering the Russians?"

Makei snorted disdainfully. "I can't be bothered to attend to a parcel of women at a time like this," he declared. "I want blood."

His manner was certainly vindictive.

"Quite so," agreed Fujiwara more mildly—though his eyes twinkled with a flash of their old humour. "A very natural and healthy appetite for a son of Japan at the present moment."

Makei was still balancing himself on his toes. If nature had denied him the stature of a giant, he meant every one to understand that he possessed the heart of a lion.

But he condescended to explain to his friend.

"Miyo has been spoilt by her English mother," he said confidentially. "When I explain her duty to her, she actually will argue—argue with *Me*. Now, Fujiwara, as you know, nothing so upsets my principles as the idea of a woman who dares to argue."

"My dear Makei, I quite agree. But you must not let her do it. Hark! if I don't mistake, that is her voice. She has been in the temple with—with her friend O Hana San."

As he spoke the clear ripple of a girl's laugh rang out on the air. A laugh which was all mirth, with never a shadow of care to weight it.

Makei flushed, looking eagerly up the steps

where a moment ago he had caught sight of a kimono amongst the pines.

"I really believe it is," he began, whilst doubt was changed to certainty at sight of pretty little Miyo herself, with a cluster of girl friends around her, making the most charming of pictures as they grouped together on the steps above.

Fujiwara bowed low with elaborate courtesy.

"Ah, Miyo San," he called, "here is Makei, who is dying to instruct you in the duties of women."

Down the steps she came, her parasol twirling, her bright eyes brimming with mischief and laughter. A moment she paused, waving her adieux to the friends who were in haste to be on their homeward way, then turned back to greet the men who awaited her.

If it is true that all mousmés are naturally addicted to flirting, Miyo San must have imbibed a double share of that particular taste from her English mother. As to shyness, she had no idea as to what the sensation might be.

"Kounichi-wa, honourable Captain," she laughed, bowing and rubbing her knees in salutation to Fujiwara.

"And you, of course, are going to see Hana."

There was a dimple lurking in a smooth pink cheek which had already proved the abomination and delight of Makei's heart. Fujiwara, whilst viewing it with equanimity, blushed at the sly words.

"Why," he stammered, "how do you—do you——"

Miyo flirted her fan, hiding a laughing mouth.

"You see," she retorted, "I am a woman of the world, and a shrewd observer; I know all about the affairs of the heart; I've read all about them in the English novels. Besides"—she dropped her fan with an affected yawn—"I've had lots of practice."

Fujiwara picked up the fan, masking an amused smile as he did so. His face was, indeed, preternaturally solemn as he returned the fan.

"Honourably don't be hard on poor Makei," he murmured, "seeing what helpless things men are. He only wants you to be obedient and respectful and wait for him till he's a General."

He looked back as he spoke to where Makei was standing, trying hard to assume as stolid an air of indifference as though no bewitching little mousmé in mauve and white kimono, with heliotrope blossoms in her fair hair, were so exasperatingly near to him.

Miyo San had evidently learnt her lessons very badly, or she would not have forgotten that the pages of that all-important book—the Higher Learning of Women—taught the observance of the three obediences whereby women are urged to remember the necessity of entire humility, respect and unquestioning obedience to mankind, be it brother, husband, father, or son.

At the very mention of that odious word—obedience—she tossed her pretty head and pursed her rosy lips in mutinous fashion.

It was quite time for Fujiwara to be going—and he lost no time about it.

"Remember," he whispered, as he passed the stoical Makei, "be firm and stern with her. Above all—don't let her argue."

Makei gave not the slightest appearance of having heard the warning. Apparently he was admiring the view. Miyo watched him from the distance of half-a-dozen yards and smiled. She knew exactly what he was thinking of, and that he dared not look in her direction. All the same she intended that he *should* look—and look again.

So, no sooner had Fujiwara disappeared than she sidled a little nearer, peeping at her unresponsive companion from behind her parasol.

Still he continued to stare before him, seemingly unconscious of her presence.

His persistence began to exasperate an impatient little lady. And silence was not a virtue that Miyo found at all attractive.

"You were about to say, sir?" she began, driven to desperation.

And Makei fell into the trap at once.

Turning, he found himself confronted by the sweetest little personage, with golden wealth of curls crowning the daintiest of heads. It was not at all the orthodox Japanese mousmé, bashful and coy, black-haired and meek mannered, such as Lieutenant Makei had once declared to be his ideal; but all the same, having looked, he had to look again, just to rebuke her with majestic displeasure.

"No, I wasn't," he replied severely. "I have nothing to say. It was Captain Fujiwara."

Miyo San tilted her parasol to a more coquettish

angle and smiled—smiled so pensively and serenely that latent irritation flamed into sudden anger.

Lieutenant Makei swung round, facing his still serenely smiling cousin with a frown of becoming severity.

"If it comes to that," he stormed, "I *did* want to say, before starting to this war, that, whether I come back alive or not, I shall never consent to marry a woman who smiles at me in this disrespectful manner."

Miyo raised her fan to her chin. She was still smiling more radiantly than before.

"I shall smile," she affirmed, "just how and when I like."

And she nodded her bright little head to emphasize her words.

Makei took a step forward. "You shan't," he cried—and thought he had crushed that daring spirit of rebellion at a word.

But Miyo San was not only smiling now, she actually dared to laugh—to laugh, positively *laugh* in his face.

"I shall," she retorted, with tiny backward steps. "I shall! I shall!"

She was the very incarnation of revolted womanhood. But Makei was persistent.

"You won't," he declared, his tones trembling with anger. "You won't! You won't!"

From behind a parasol, presented shield-like at his breast, came a mocking echo—

"I *shall!*"

One cannot quarrel with one's inferiors!—that was how Makei resolved to defend his dignity. He

ceased to argue, but put his ultimatum in solemn tones—not even so much as deigning to peep behind the parasol.

"Very well, then, madam," he averred. "I have thought very deeply about this question for many years, and I have made up my mind that a Japanese lady ought invariably—I say invariably—to obey her husband."

The parasol was twisted back in a moment, showing tip-tilted chin and blue eyes which were perfectly scathing in their denunciation.

"Then let me tell you, sir," piped Miyo San, with the most impudent little mockery of a humble salutation, "that I have thought about this question ever since I was a little girl, and I have made up my mind that my husband shall treat me as the English and Americans treat *their* wives—and let me do whatever I like."

She minced forward with an absurd little air of triumph—and of course Makei had to be looking at her all the time in the hopes of annihilating that reprehensible spirit of insubordination.

Her last remark, however, proved too much even for Japanese self-control.

Makei raised his hands as though invoking the gods to call punishment down on that dainty but rebellious head.

"But this becomes impossible," he cried. "Thank goodness a Japanese husband can still divorce his wife for being disrespectful!"

Miyo's laugh rang as light and gay as the lilt of a bird.

"Thank goodness," she echoed in mock grati-

tude, "a Japanese husband can't divorce his wife before she's married to him."

Makei's sneer was a thing to be wondered at.

"Thank goodness," he retorted, "a Japanese lady is bound to marry the man her father chooses for her!"

The dainty parasol was in danger of catastrophe overtaking it, so fast was it being twirled in an impatient little hand.

"Thank goodness," murmured the owner of the parasol, "I shall never, never marry any man unless he has first made love to me, as they do in the English novels, and respectfully begged me to take him."

"Then, madam, I am sorry"—Makei's sorrow was expressed with grandiloquent dignity—"but I cannot marry you. I have quite decided that to show affection to a woman is a sign of weakness in a man—and a great deal of trouble."

The finality of the speech, instead of bringing the despair it called for, produced no effect whatever on the recreant lady.

"Then there is no more to be said," observed Miyo San, and walked away humming a gay little tune.

It appeared, however, that Lieutenant Makei had not finished his explanations—and besides he could not now see the dimple.

"It would be most improper," he continued, following on the heels of a small alluring figure. "No lady who was properly brought up would expect it."

She was round in a flash, carrying the war into

the enemy's camp with a vigour which proved her the daughter of her father.

"You say that I have not been properly brought up?" she inquired wrathfully.

And Makei retreated before the storm.

If he said much more in this strain there would be the General to reckon with, so he tried propitiation on the broadest lines.

"Won't you take a chocolate?" he demanded, as though in continuation of the most pacific small talk.

Miyo San hesitated. But she was large-souled in a moment of victory—and chocolates were her special weakness.

So she consoled Makei by helping herself eagerly.

"Thank you," she deigned to say, "I do love chocolates."

This was encouraging. Makei began to feel he had been hard on this very pretty little maid, who was only a child after all.

"You must know," he murmured, "that I am very deeply in——"

Blue eyes raised suddenly and mischievously to his were decidedly disconcerting.

"Sir——?" interrogated Miyo San, in her turn trying a little encouragement.

Makei blushed and rallied, remembering a bold resolution. "I was going to say," he explained, "that I have always been miserably interested in your honourable improvement. But I have made up my mind that *my* daughters shall not be sent to the English school. Take another chocolate."

He hastened to thrust sweet temptation in the way of argument.

Miyo took the chocolate, but paused with it halfway to her mouth. She did not wish to accept bribes under false pretences.

"Then let me tell you, sir," she replied firmly, "that I have made up my mind that my daughters shall go to whatever school I please."

The remark threw Makei off his guard.

"They shan't!" he said.

Miyo was delighted. "They shall," she mocked, with a little skip to emphasize the words; "they shall! they shall!"

Makei turned away with an air of cold disdain.

"Very well, madam," he answered, "I'm sorry, but I shall have to take my daughters away from your charge."

"*Your* daughters!" cried Miyo, and held the nibbled chocolate at arm's length. "But I tell you they will be my daughters."

"They will be mine," said Makei firmly—he meant making a last stand on that point—one must be firm with such a contradictory little will-o'-the-wisp as this cousin of his.

But Miyo was pink now with annoyance.

"Mine, mine, mine!" she scolded, and then, finding he meant to take no further notice, she tossed her head scornfully. "Very well," said she, "you may keep your daughters. I am sorry for the poor girls. But, under the circumstances, I decline to have anything more to do with them. And—and you may take your chocolate back. I hate it!"

And, in a whirlwind of tempestuous indignation she threw down the sweetmeat.

This was more than Makei had bargained for. Miyo San must be feeling very angry indeed to throw away chocolates.

So quite humbly—for so distinguished a soldier of the Emperor—he picked up the despised sweet, dusting it sadly. "This means," he asked, "that you finally refuse me?"

Miyo clapped her hands—and who would have believed she could ever have been angry as she in her turn picked up a fallen parasol?

"So you *have* asked me after all," she cried triumphantly. "But you are too young, child. A lady could not think of marrying a little boy." It was a final thrust—and because she wanted to enjoy the full delight of it, Miyo San ran away laughing, down the hill-slope, through orchards as dainty in their pink and white canopies as the little lady who danced along beneath them, till she reached the quaint little dolls'-house where O Fusa San and other girl friends were awaiting her. And so heartless a little coquette was she that she never so much as thought of giving a backward glance to tell the man who stood on the hill-slope above that she was only teasing after all.

If she cried over the omission afterwards, why, unfortunately poor Makei knew nothing about it. But that is too often a woman's way.

MISS FLORENCE SMITHSON AS O HANA SAN

"GAY LITTLE, GLAD LITTLE GIRLS ARE WE,
EAGER TO PLEASE AND FAIR TO SEE"

CHAPTER III

SUKI THE FORTUNE-TELLER

All the village was in a hubbub that day. And what more natural? Did not the big ship which lay yonder tell its own tale? And soon, very soon, the ship would be sailing away, carrying with it hundreds and hundreds of the brave sons of Japan whose hearts were on fire to go forth and fight their country's enemies and show the world that here was a people which from henceforth had to be reckoned with amongst the great civilized nations.

That was why they had come to the shrine of Tsumura up there on the hill-top, to pray to the brave ancestors of former days to hold Japanese honour untarnished and help to give victory to their sons.

Soon the time for farewells must be coming, and there must be no tears shed, even though fond arms clung tightly around those whom loving hearts found it so hard to offer blithely at the shrine of the Great War-god.

But with the shadows blended laughter, such as there always is and always will be in the hours when tragedy stands side by side with her laughing sister—a shadow only in the other's sunshine.

A peal of merry laughter, the patter of clogs, the

flash of gay robes and gleaming broideries, as a troupe of geisha come laughing and singing down the path leading to the lake side.

Close by was the village, with its quaint little houses, and still quainter garden plots, whilst beyond, through the pine-trees one caught a glimpse of the blue sea without the more ominous sight of the great ship which was so much in the thoughts of all, saving, perhaps, these gay little butterflies of geisha who trooped along one behind the other up the path, chanting their merry chorus as they came.

Gay little, glad little girls are we,
Eager to please and fair to see ;
We like men
With lots of yen,
The door of our hearts has a golden key!
So where is the man who'll pass us by?
Sweet little mouth and laughing eye.
Kisses too,
All for you!
Come along, come along! Don't be shy.[1]

Such a tinkling melody it made, all in a piece with the quaint, picturesque scenery, and still more prettily picturesque singers, grouped together, eager for some amusement to wile away an idle hour.

But no better amusement did they discover than the sight of Lieutenant Makei, walking along the dusty road, with a most unusually dejected mien.

He looked up at sound of a chorus of laughter, and blinked his eyes in the sunlight.

"Mitsu's geisha troupe," said he in some surprise. "Hello, little girls!"

A merry-faced geisha girl leaned over the low

[1] By permission of Messrs. Chappell & Co., Ltd

wall, with its gay creepers mantling grey stone. "Hello, little General!" she retorted. "Come and show us the wonderful Hana the men are all raving about."

Makei shook his head lugubriously.

"No. I've got a war to look after," he retorted. "I've done with women for ever."

Sumako drew back, laughing and pouting.

"Thank goodness," she declared, "there's *one* soldier who's not in love with the holy mousmé. Come, girls."

But another geisha, dressed in a gay crimson kimono with rich embroideries—such as only the geisha and play-actors are allowed to wear—stood shading her eyes with her hand.

"Look!" she cried rapturously, "Suki the fortune-teller."

A third girl, perching herself on a gnarled tree-stump, nodded her black head wisely.

"Then Mitsu isn't far off," she averred.

Sumako stared at the quaint figure which was seen approaching down the road to the village. "I wonder what *he's* got to do with our troupe?" she questioned.

Ko-Yanogi laughed idly—it was too hot to get excited over anything to-day. "Perhaps not much with the troupe," she answered, "but a good deal with Mitsu."

The other geisha crowded down to where the fortune-teller had set up his small stock-in-trade on a table under a wide-spreading tree, whilst a curious throng of children and villagers already began to crowd round.

Fortune-tellers ply a brisk trade in Japan, for they must be consulted by all, rich and poor alike, before any business or undertaking is settled. If a Japanese householder wants to change his place of residence the fortune-teller must be asked to advise on the matter. Even if it is only a tooth that has to be extracted, the fortune-teller must decree the most propitious time for the operation. If, however, his advice and inclination chance to clash on any very important matter, the Japanese has only one expedient—he must do his best to cheat the gods with the most elaborate politeness and circumvention he can command.

Therefore the coming of Suki was an event to be taken advantage of, and the little man, with his impudent face, persuasive manner and quaint dress, soon had more clients than he could attend to.

So he bowed to all, introducing himself and his trade with quite unnecessary loquaciousness.

"Now, honourable ladies," he declared genially, "I can forecast your future by the stars, the crystal ball, the lines of your hand, or the inside of your teacup. I can——"

Pretty Ko-Matsu thrust herself forward between a group of gaping working-women who had but just come up from the paddy fields where they had been busily employed all day in separating rice.

Ko-Matsu, in her gay geisha robes, looked to these simple folks like a being from another sphere, and they drew back, staring admiringly at sight of her and the bevy of geisha who followed to the fortune-teller's table.

"Can you tell when Mitsu's going to pay our

wages?" demanded Ko-Matsu, laughing boisterously, with a back glance at her companions.

Suki bowed, rubbing his knees.

"Yes," he affirmed, with gravity. "I foresee that you will begin to draw wages just about as soon as you begin to draw customers—eh, my dear?"

Ko-Matsu drew back, pouting, whilst a couple of coolies who had paused on their way villagewards laughed at the geisha's expense.

Sumako, however, struck in from over her companion's shoulder—

"You'd better advise Mitsu to engage the holy maid," she said. To tell the truth, the fame of O Hana San rankled sorely in a jealous heart. Sumako, as head geisha, was not pleased to divide her honour with this gentle miko of a Shinto temple.

"Thank you," replied Suki sweetly. "Not at all a bad idea. A priestess who can sing is better than a troupe of singing-girls who can only preach."

Sumako stamped her foot.

"Come on, girls," she called; "we'll not listen to another word. I tell you——" She whispered in the others' ears and immediately the whole bevy of pretty, painted geisha went fluttering off in full retreat like a number of gaily-plumaged hummingbirds.

Suki blew an airy kiss after them with the tips of his fingers.

"Going so soon?" he called. "Well, good-bye. Now, honourable ladies, take a lesson from our departed friends and don't be shy. Lovers'

quarrels and matrimonial jars mended *while* you wait with Suki's Patent Amorous Stickfast. Who wants a copy of Suki's *Art of Lovemaking?* It will teach you more about love than anybody ever knew. Come closer and tell me all your little troubles."

A village girl, shy and blushing, came a step nearer, hesitated, and was pushed forward by eager friends.

"Ah, Flower of a Kiss!" cried the once more genial fortune-teller. "You want to know whether your soldier will be faithful to you? From what I have seen of Taro I'm afraid——" He paused, a trifle compassionate at sight of a wistful face. So, with a show of great wisdom, he took up his magic rod, examining it carefully. "Ah, what's this?" he mused. "Lucky little Flower! You're all right. Taro is more of a fool than he looks, and, remember, the biggest fools make the best husbands."

He held out his hand for payment, which the blushing Flower of a Kiss presented in a paper I.O.U. or "chit."

Suki's face was twisted into an expressive grimace as he held the paper out at arm's length. "Another I.O.U.," he groaned. "I'm doing the trade of my life in this place; any amount of august patronage and no money! Ah, my dreamy Calm Sea, what did you ask?"

The girl, plain featured and already past her first youth, hung her head bashfully.

But Suki delighted in making a running commentary of the confidences reposed in him, regardless of outraged modesty.

"Should you take Furioki or Tomatsu?" he asked. "In these hard times, my girl, take the first fool that offers and thank the gods for your luck."

It appeared that Calm Sea only valued this excellent advice to the extent of another I.O.U., which brought a fresh groan to Suki's lips.

"Another," he sighed. "Oh, this is *fortune* indeed!"

He looked round at a crowd of village girls who were evidently carrying on some heated discussion; whispered words, titters of amusement and some slight expressions of indignation ended in the pushing forward of one of their number, a rosy-faced maid whose eyes were half-appealing, half-reproachful as she looked up at the fortune-teller from under her straw-thatched hat.

Suki tried encouragement as the damsel hesitated to act the part assigned to her.

"What can I do for you, my Lily Bloom?" he asked, rubbing his knees politely.

The girl returned the salutation and summoned up courage to put her demand.

"Honourable sir," she faltered, "you promised that we should all marry officers of the Army who were simply dying for us—but we haven't seen them yet."

Suki wagged his head sagely.

"Perhaps they *have* died for you," he replied.

Another girl pushed forward, remembering the hardly-earned coin she had paid for a former promise.

"If they go to the war," she said, "we may never see them at all."

Suki looked grave. Accusing eyes surrounded

him—he must certainly make an effort to regain fading reputation.

"Honourably permit," he murmured, bowing affably all round. "Leave that to me. I'll ask the Emperor to put off the war and let them stop till you have done with them."

The village maids were delighted.

Surely, after all, this fortune-teller was a very great man!

"We humbly thank you," they chorused. "We gratefully salute you."

It was, of course, sure to be all right now, and they would have their lovers.

Suki, left master of the entire situation, looked round with a sigh of satisfaction.

He was glad he had had that last inspiration.

A sound of sobbing interrupted a calculation as to how I.O.U.'s of uncertain value might be transferred into coin of the realm.

"Hulloa!" he exclaimed, at sight of a small figure in a blue kimono which was huddled against the trunk of a cherry-tree. "One little lamb left bleating? What's the matter?"

The child continued to sob.

Suki had a tender heart—and a small flower face looked pitiful in its woe.

With a careful glance up the road, he approached the forlorn maiden.

"What's the matter, anata?" he asked wheedlingly—she certainly *was* pretty, with round, rosy cheeks and very black eyes.

"They say," whispered the child, "I—I'm not—not old enough to have a sweetheart."

The trouble being told, sobs and tears came louder and faster than ever.

It really behoved the parental Suki to dry the latter as well as he could.

"Nonsense," he urged; "I've got the very thing for you. Hashimoto wants a wife. Don't cry—you'll spoil your pretty eyes."

After all, Umé was beginning to feel less disconsolate now, and she even essayed a watery little smile.

"Do you—think so, sir?" she asked, and looked artlessly into Suki's whimsical face.

It was much more amusing—though probably less profitable—than fortune-telling.

Suki somehow discovered a diminutive handkerchief and began to dry the said eyes with zealous care.

"There, little one," he said cheerfully; "feel better now?"

Of course she felt *much* better, and, to prove it, took out powder-puff and glass to be quite sure she was looking—nice.

But Suki's interest did not end with the restoration to smiles. A fortune-teller ought to be in sympathy with possible clients, he felt.

"What's your name?" he asked, and it was perfectly natural that a long, lean arm should steal round a slender waist.

"Plum Blossom," was the ready answer.

"Oh, Fruit-y fruit-y!" sighed Suki.

Then Umé asked, "Is it true you are engaged to Mitsu, the Mistress of the Geisha?"

Suki looked positively shocked.

"Mitsu!" he exclaimed. "Oh no."

He had his back to the road, and was quite unaware that a lady of large proportions, dressed in a kimono of gaudily-flowered design, had already come to a stop under the tree where his humble stock-in-trade was spread.

"Mitsu!" he repeated, with a shudder. "Who that sipped the sweetness of Plum Blossom would sigh for a pumpkin? Now, little plum, you may cuddle quite——"

"Suki!"

There was something sepulchral in the deep tones of the voice.

"Suki!"

Plum Blossom was left standing, ruffled and indignant, shorn of protecting arms, whilst Suki began hurriedly fingering his magic rod, crystal ball—in fact, anything and everything which might take his gaze from the figure in the beflowered kimono which stood before him in judgment.

The Mistress of the Geisha could be very impressive when she liked. She "liked" now, and glared at Plum Blossom with the glance of a basilisk.

"I miserably fear," she observed, bowing in mock salutation, "that I have interrupted the diminutive female in her honourable love-talk. Perhaps the lady is not aware that I have the misfortune to be your——"

Suki raised his hand in supplication.

If Mitsu, being in a tantrum, proclaimed the fact that he was a married man, it was good-bye to his business as fortune-teller.

"My friend," he supplemented. "One of my

oldest friends. We were just speaking of you, weren't we? What was I saying about Mitsu's charms? Just like—like——"

But Umé—or Plum Blossom, as she called herself—was angry too, and anger made her malicious.

So she bowed, rubbing her knees in salutation to her rival, whilst a flicker of amusement parted her lips.

"My wretched memory may be at fault," she murmured, "but I thought you compared the disastrous lady to a pumpkin."

The shaft was unexpected.

Mitsu's eyes bulged with indignation.

"Pumpkin!" she gasped. "Me a pumpkin!"

Suki had retreated half behind the tree, but Mitsu, stepping back, discovered him in the indulgement of stifled laughter.

One glance was enough.

Suki remembered his obligations.

"How dare you call the lady a pumpkin?" he demanded. "What I really said was——"

But Mitsu was not prepared to receive explanations.

"Your honourable breath," she retorted, annihilating her husband with a glance, "falls on my contemptible ears like water on the back of the honourable duck."

Suki was at his wits' end.

"Honourably permit——" he stammered.

"My complexion may not be so new as the paint from the honourable lady's face on your sleeve," continued Mitsu, who had merely paused for breath, "but——"

Umé's smile was pensiveness itself.

"I am grateful to the august lady for reminding me that my wretched complexion is not equal to her blooming cheek," she murmured.

"My——"

Really if it continued the Mistress of the Geisha would be threatened by an apoplexy.

"Honourably permit," gasped the distressed Suki, who had been vainly trying to intervene in what promised to become a pretty duel of words, "I hate to interrupt this most elegant conversation, but——"

Plum Blossom was quivering with indignation.

"Will you request this honourable swollen cabbage——" she began.

But Mitsu's strident tones bore her down.

"Will you ask this distinguished shrivelled bamboo——"

"Ladies—ladies——"

The eloquent Suki was on the verge of tears.

Plum Blossom's chin was tilted aggressively high.

"Thank you," she said, addressing the perspiring fortune-teller. "You honourably remind me that I despicably forget myself. It is the duty of the young to pay respect to the ancient."

She saluted first one and then the other with profound bows, which both returned as though all three had been engaged in most amiable conversation, then, gathering the folds of her kimono around her, she marched off, with as much dignity as an aggressive kitten might have displayed after coming off victor in a miniature battle.

CHAPTER IV

SUKI GIVES UNWELCOME EVIDENCE

"So this is how you pass your time! You, a married man with a baby."

Suki, having arranged and re-arranged his table with the greatest possible diligence, came sidling slowly back to the indignant Mitsu's side.

He did not want to quarrel with Mitsu, having long since discovered that geisha are more profitable than fortune-telling, when the latter is paid by country girls' I.O.U.'s. So at the present moment he was the essence of honeyed sweetness.

"Ah," he sighed, hugging himself fondly since it was evidently dangerous to attempt hugging his wife in her present mood. "That precious baby, with his little brown toes. Just like his mother."

But Mitsu was not to be cajoled so easily. "Never mind my little brown toes," she retorted. "Don't you try to make a fool of me."

Suki chuckled. "I only did that once," he allowed. "When you fell in love with me."

Mitsu smiled grudgingly. "Yes," she agreed. "I *was* a fool to marry you. I was the most popular geisha in Japan."

"Of course you were," cried the delighted Suki. "Haven't I written columns in the local papers

describing all Tokyo at your feet?—pouring gold and gems and jewels all over you?"

She shrugged her plump shoulders, and started on her latest grievance.

"What's the good of that?" she asked, "when every one here is running after Hana?"

Suki chuckled again, commencing a kind of dance by throwing out one tabi'd foot, then another, with a quick shuffle.

"Very well, then," said he airily. "I'll engage Hana."

Mitsu stared—this time in genuine amazement.

"A miko as a geisha? You must be mad!" she exclaimed, edging away from him. "But I'll keep our marriage secret no longer. Every one shall know."

Suki sat down suddenly on the ground, crossing his legs and folding his arms.

"Very well," he replied tranquilly, "that settles me as a fortune-teller—and of course no one will engage a married woman as a geisha."

"I don't care," she raved. "You can't get over me again. Plum Blossom, indeed! And——"

"You're very firm."

"I'm not to be moved by flattery either."

Suki smiled. "The very thing I said to the tea-house man when he said that any man could twist you round his finger."

Mitsu frowned. "Hashimoto said that?" she asked.

"Yes. He was saying that all women are vain, and——"

"Well, most of them are. But——"

"Precisely. But I said to Hashimoto at once, 'Now look at Mitsu; there's a mousmé who has a *right* to be vain. There's a woman who *is* beautiful. But no one could say that she knows it.'"

The flattery was exactly what Mitsu could not withstand. She yielded without a struggle.

"Oh, Suki. Did you really?" she asked. "No wonder he looked at me so funnily this morning. And did *he* think I was—er—nice-looking?"

All Suki's eloquence had returned. After all it had been an easy victory.

"Did he think!" he exclaimed, with vigour. "'If I had'—he said—'a beautiful, hard-working, rich woman like her, I'd never need to do another stroke of work as long as I live.'"

"Oh, Suki!"

"And now he wants me to get him married—on commission."

"The old fool! But who is she?"

"He won't tell me. But never mind. We are going to make money out of Hashimoto."

Mitsu sighed. "Well, *I* can't get any from him," she owned. "You're sure he's rich?"

"He must be. He's too mean to be poor."

"Well, I hope you are right. But you know your schemes don't always come off."

"That's because the other fools never do what I expect them to. But this time we're *right*."

Suki had finished packing up his stock-in-trade as he spoke. Custom appeared to be languishing in the neighbourhood of the village. It struck him suddenly that the little plateau half-way up the

temple hill would be better suited for the plying of his trade.

With the village full of soldiers on the eve of departing for war, a fortune-teller might make sure of custom if he caught his clients on their return from prayer.

But, as they moved along the road, Mitsu walking by her husband's side, eager to hear further particulars of this scheme concerning Hashimoto, a Corporal accompanied by two soldiers reined up alongside of them.

"Where is General Okubo?" demanded the Corporal, whose face was covered with dust and sweat, whilst the horses of all three men bore evidence of hard riding.

Suki stared up blinking. "General Okubo?" he asked. "If you will honourably please to wait whilst I consult my crystal ball, you shall have exact intelligence of his honourable whereabouts for the miserable sum of——"

The Corporal uttered an impatient exclamation.

"The dispatch is important," he said. "From His Majesty the Emperor. If you do not know where the General is——"

Mitsu's shrill voice interrupted the speaker.

"There is General Okubo, coming down the road with Lieutenant Ito," she said, pointing forward. Then, as the Corporal galloped on to meet the two officers, "You're a fool, Suki," she added, "a miserable fool. Do you understand? As if——"

But Suki took no notice. "That is quite true," he said. "It is the General. His daughter has been to me to have her fortune told. See, Mitsu,

how easily and affably I shall make friends with him."

The Corporal was already riding back to the village with his companions in search of refreshment when Suki and his wife reached the spot where the General was talking to his Lieutenant.

"It is as I expected," he was saying. "The very dispatch for which we have been waiting. We sail immediately."

It appeared to be a favourable moment. Suki drew closer, bowing and rubbing his knees.

"Honourably permit," he began, with his professional whine, "an old war-scarred veteran of the Chinese War, sir, to——"

The General frowned. "Go away," he commanded impatiently.

Suki drew back—but not far. There might yet be an opportunity—and even generals of His Majesty's army did not disdain to have their fortunes told.

"Where's Yamaki?" demanded General Okubo briefly; his weather-beaten old face was working with the excitement which this news had brought to his heart.

Immediate action had been what he longed for.

"He is coming, sir," replied Ito, going to a bend in the road and beckoning to a figure seen in the distance.

Again Suki took advantage of the interval of waiting.

"A fine officer, Captain Yamaki," he insinuated, creeping back to the General's side. "Plenty of money, and knows how to spend it."

But the General was impatient. "Go away," he commanded angrily.

It was a last chance, and Suki rushed on his fate. At any rate he must gain the General's attention if he expected later to secure his favour.

"We missed you last night," he put in, with the air of a privileged buffoon, "at Captain Yamaki's farewell dinner, sir. Lots of wine and geisha—a bit of fighting and lots of card-playing."

Ito and Yamaki had come back together up the road. They were just in time to hear Suki's last remark, and Yamaki's face grew black as a thundercloud.

"What's that?" asked the General sharply; then, to a couple of soldiers who were passing on their way to the village: "Men, remove this nuisance."

The soldiers—both of whom had had their fortunes told earlier in the day and were inclined now to regret wasted sen, grinned and seized hold of the unfortunate Suki without more ado.

Suki, yielding to superior force, went, protesting.

"Indeed, indeed, General," he urged, "I haven't told you the best part. I was going to tell your fortune. Honourably permit—put me down."

But the General's back was turned on him, and Suki, grumbling and crestfallen, was not allowed to put foot to the ground till the village was reached.

It was too bad!—and even Mitsu had forsaken him. He should have to tramp back all alone to the plateau on the hill if he meant to do any more business in this miserable place.

But Suki was a philosopher, shaking himself

more comfortably into his clothes, he started off on his journey.

Meantime he had succeeded in doing more than he had any idea of.

General Okubo greeted Yamaki with stern inquiry, which almost partook of the nature of accusation.

"Yamaki," he said, looking fixedly at the younger man, and becoming suddenly aware how difficult the latter found it to meet his gaze, "that man tells me *you* were the cause of the revelry I heard at the tea-house last night. Wine, fighting, and gambling. Bad example, sir, for young officers like Fujiwara. Don't answer me, but see to it that no debts of honour—or dishonour—are left behind to disgrace the regiment. I'll degrade any officer who has not discharged his liabilities."

There was a moment's silence—and, good actor though he was, Yamaki found it hard to keep the hatred from his face at mention of his rival's name.

"The model Fujiwara again!" he muttered, as he watched the General and Lieutenant Ito on their way down to the shore. "But I will be even with him before we leave Tsumura. That I swear by the honourable bones of my ancestors."

It was an oath that he felt he had it now in his power to fufil.

CHAPTER V

THE HOLY MIKO

A GROUP of geisha, flower-like in the background; before them, with their faces turned from the quizzical stare of the girls, were three of the pilgrims who, earlier in the day, had come to worship at the shrine of Tsumura.

The pilgrims were looking up, expectant and eager, towards the hill-top. The geisha, curious and tittering, were whispering together.

"They say the singing-maid is coming down," said little Ko-Fuji, hiding half her face behind a paper fan.

Ko-Yanogi, the jealous, leaned forward, tapping the nearest pilgrim on his arm.

"*Can* she sing?" she demanded.—"This over-praised Hana San?"

The man turned his head, looking into the pretty face, with its whitened cheeks, blackened hair and eyebrows, without admiration.

"You'll think so when you hear her," he replied, whilst one of his companions bent forward, raising his finger.

"Hark!" he whispered; "that's her voice."

The geisha flirted her fan coquettishly—for reasons best known to herself, she had taken a posi-

tive dislike to this holy miko who had turned the heads of half the men in Japan.

How ridiculously eager all those absurd pilgrims were, pushing and edging nearer to the steps to catch first glimpses of the slim young figure in its soft, dove-coloured kimono and embroidered obi, which came slowly down, singing in a low undertone, as though more to herself than those around.

The Spirit of the Shrine embodied in fair womanhood she might have been, so in unison did she seem with the hushed peace and beauty around.

A sweet, serious face, fair in its innocent loveliness as any lily bloom which nestled amongst the mosses, with eyes haunted by the dream which Nature whispers in her quiet solitudes to those children who are content to dwell there.

Heedless of the pilgrims, who bent low in salutation, heedless of the gay little bunch of brightly-dressed geisha gathered on the low bridge, she advanced into the open, whilst the rich sweetness of her voice rang fuller in a sudden exultation of melody.

And the song itself? Could it be put into words, this hymn to Nature—this embodiment of the peace and mystic spell of a sacred spot?

Words, voice, singer seemed in some indefinable way part of the very worship which led the eager devotees up to the ancient temple on the hill.

She did not belong to the hurrying, laughter-loving, turbulent present, this holy maid of Tsumura, but rather to that past in which Kieki San the priest dwelt. A world where change was not,

and the romance of a dead past was woven around its dreaming habitants.

The song ended in long, lingering cadences, which were broken ruthlessly in upon by Ko-Yanogi's loud laugh.

Conscious of the spell, the little geisha resented it as something likely to be more potent than her own charms.

"I don't think much of her singing," she cried, tittering rudely behind her fan. "Look at her dress."

She flaunted her own gay robes as she spoke.

"And her figure," laughed Ko-Giku, giggling too as she watched Hana turning towards them, with wondering surprise on her gentle face.

"I don't see why the men should leave us for her," replied a third, and, jumping up, the volatile little troupe went dancing off, flirting their fans and parasols whilst singing more shrilly than ever their geisha chorus.

Hana stood watching them with troubled eyes, till one of the pilgrims, passing her on his way down the slope, ventured humbly to touch the edge of her long sleeve.

"You mustn't mind them," he whispered. "They are only geisha."

She started, smiled and moved away towards the cottage.

Only geisha! Yes, she had heard of them, and pitied them, too, as her gentle heart would have pitied any who were condemned to live in that bustling, busy world, away from the peace and dream-land of the temple.

But Hana was not to have any more time for dreaming that day, and—ah, well! it is sometimes good that we cannot look too far into the future.

It was Miyo-ko-San who interrupted her reverie now, though that had already been broken by the sound of a band playing in the distance.

It seemed curious how those loud, jarring notes thrilled her with some new feeling, half exultant, half despairing.

The sons of Japan were going to fight their country's enemies. That was good and brave and right. But why should O Hana San, the temple nun, feel that new, vibrating note at her heart which seemed over and over again to repeat a name?

How strange and how wonderful a thing was life—and there *was* a life beyond the temple courts, a life in which Captain Fujiwara, the officer of His Majesty the Emperor, lived.

Hana San tried hard to check the wild throbbing of her heart as Miyo San, still the little mauve and white mousmé of the morning, though with cheeks still pinker and blue eyes more eager and sparkling, burst in on her solitude like a miniature tornado.

"Oh, Hana, aren't you coming down to the ship?"

Miyo was all excitement and bubbling patriotism for the moment. Tears and loneliness would come after. At present the band was inspiriting, the cheering and enthusiasm contagious.

But Hana drew back. "No," she faltered. "Honourably excuse. Away from the shrine I am ill at ease."

Miyo pouted. "But to say good-bye to Captain Fujiwara," she pleaded.

The colour came in a crimson wave to Hana's pale cheeks. "Oh no," she said quickly, "I couldn't do that."

"Perhaps you are right." Miyo's lips were hidden by her fan. "It would only make him conceited."

"I am quite sure Captain Fujiwara is not conceited."

Down went the fan, and Miyo was laughing as she clapped her hands mischievously together.

"Oh, that's all I wanted to know," she cried.

Hana looked surprised. "Whether the honourable Captain is conceited?" she asked.

"No! Whether you are in love."

"Oh, Miyo! I——"

"Yes, yes. Though you have been brought up in a cage, the bars could not shut out the sunshine."

"Sunshine? Is love, then, like sunshine?" and Hana stretched out her hands, feeling the warm rays which glinted down through the trees on her bare arms.

"Well," said Miyo briskly, "some say it's all moonshine. It is evil—and good. It is sour as vinegar and sweet as sugar. It is hot as pepper and refreshing as wine. It's an everlasting plague and torment, and—and oh! it's simply lovely!"

Hana looked seriously at her volatile little friend; the child put on an air at once so wise and yet droll.

"You are making mock of me," she said slowly. "It is *you* who are in love."

Miyo blushed and laughed. After all, she was but a child.

"Of course," she agreed; "twenty times a day. But I'm a woman of the world," and she flirted her fan with all the impudent boldness of a geisha.

But Hana's hand came quickly on to her wrist.

"There is some one coming," she whispered in a startled tone. "Oh, Miyo! It is Captain Fujiwara; I must go."

She looked round quickly, and, spying the cottage, fled towards it as swiftly as some shy forest creature.

Miyo, looking down the path and seeing two khaki-clad figures, made a little grimace and followed slowly.

"I suppose I must go too," she murmured. "But I'd much rather stay!"

The two khaki-clad figures had reached the plateau just as the shoji was closed.

Captain Fujiwara looked round, a shadow of disappointment on his handsome face.

"You young scarecrow," said he to Makei, in good-humoured raillery, "you've frightened them away; for I swear I heard Hana's voice as we came up the slope. None could mistake the soft melody of those tones." He sighed as he spoke.

Makei, however, was looking round. "And I swear no one would mistake Miyo's laugh," said he. "Ah!—hush, Fujiwara, they are laughing at us behind the shoji. Move away and you'll see."

They moved into the shadow of the pine trees behind the cottage, and sure enough the shoji was quickly flung open, and out danced Miyo, followed more slowly by Hana.

"They——" Miyo began, and then gave a little scream, clapping her hands and springing away towards the path, followed without a moment's hesitation by her cousin Makei.

Whether the latter had any more lectures to deliver from the book of the *Greater Learning for Women* is uncertain; but, even if so, perhaps Miyo-ko-San would have more patience to listen presently when he caught her, and they went wandering down the slope towards the cherry orchards, and, alas! also towards the shore where the ship was waiting to take Miyo's father and her cousin Makei away to that terrible Manchuria, from which so many of the brave sons of Japan would never return.

Of course, if Miyo cried—and I am not quite sure that you would have found it impossible to find a tear or two a-glint in blue eyes—the tears must naturally have been for her father. And yet—why, after all, Makei did *not* want to lecture, and the walk through the cherry orchards on that spring evening was one that Miyo-ko-San remembered all her life, though you might not have credited such a butterfly with a memory at all!

As for Hana, there she stood, like some startled dove, ready to spread her soft wings and fly back to her temple niche, whilst the colour came and went in her cheeks at sight of the tall figure in its khaki uniform which stood so humbly before her.

And Miyo San had run away and left her.

Hana looked vainly through the trees for a glimpse of her kimono, and then back at the man beside her.

"You want me to call her to return?" asked Fujiwara gently.

Hana was plucking at the embroidery of her obi.

"Yes; but—she has gone."

And that being unmistakably the case, Fujiwara gave no further thought to Miyo San, save as a contrast wherewith to commence conversation.

"You were brought up together?" he said. "Yet how different you are."

Hana nodded. It was quite easy to talk of dear little Miyo.

"Yes," she replied naïvely. "Miyo is very beautiful and clever—and as good as she is clever."

Fujiwara smiled. "Yes, I know," he agreed. "But I want to talk about you."

Again the flushed cheeks and lowered lids. Miyo would have laughed and flirted her fan coquettishly. Hana had not learnt the art of coquetry.

"Me?" she questioned. "But Miyo shines in the great world like a star, whilst I live in the deep, quiet shadow of the shrine where nothing occurs that is worth the telling."

"And the singing-bird is content to abide for ever in this cage? Is nothing wanting in this peaceful life?"

Again the strange fluttering at her heart. The mutinous outcry which rang clear and insistent above the ordered tenets of her creed.

Yet the girl grew puzzled, hardly able to realize what these feelings were which mingled with her dreams, making vivid colourings amidst a sweet monotony of shadows.

"I did not think there had been anything want-

ing," she whispered, but she allowed her hand to rest in his eager grasp, and longed that this new dream might never break.

"You *did* not think?" urged Fujiwara, with all the eagerness of a man who longs to know his fate before he leaves on some great enterprise. He would not fight less honourably if he knew that he might bring his laurels back to lay low at the shrine of a woman's feet.

"I cannot tell," replied Hana, looking up at him with eyes which told their tale far better than her tongue. "Since you came here—in the last few days—the world has changed."

"You have felt that?"

"I feel," she answered, growing more certain of that elusive sweetness as she looked into his face, "that the world began a week ago. That till a week ago I had not lived, or that this week is only a dream—a dream of exquisite joy and pain. Or—oh! I talk foolishly. I have been shaken by much strangeness. Honourably please to make silent the talk between us."

But he could not listen to that last command. Already the time was short. He *must* tell her the truth before he went away.

"Not till I have told you that these few days I have spent here will live in my memory as the sweetest of my life," he cried passionately. "You strange, dainty creature, half bird, half angel, you are the most wonderful thing I have ever known. As pure and sweet as the cherry blossom in the dew of a spring morning—why, the very sunshine seems more beautiful when it touches you. Hana! . . ."

The last word was a cry of entreaty, for Hana had freed her hand from his grasp, drawing back, half frightened at his vehemence, still more perplexed at the wave of emotion which swept over her own soul.

"Honourably please to leave me," she whispered.

And, even as she spoke, the siren sounded from the distant ship.

"You *want* me to go?" he asked huskily.

"Honourably please."

He controlled himself with difficulty. "Very well; but—won't you give me a flower?"

Hana turned aside. Flowers there were in plenty growing there amongst the mosses and in the shady nooks.

Her hand touched the leaves of a tall lily caressingly. "This is the day lily of forgetfulness," she said very softly.

Fujiwara shook his head. "And the aster?" he asked.

"That is the sacred flower of remembrance."

"Give it to me."

She smiled, plucking both lily and aster. But she offered the lily.

"The flower—of forgetfulness?" she questioned.

It was the aster he took from her hand, holding the latter for a moment to his lips.

"No—the flower of remembrance—or none," he answered; and, looking long into the girl's flower face, was satisfied at last. She would not forget him, this little Hana San, even though he might be long in returning to the temple shrine.

CHAPTER VI

HASHIMOTO TRIES TO SOLVE A PROBLEM

Up the road trudged a solitary figure, quaint in appearance, lank of limb.

Whilst soldiers were busy bidding farewell to wives and sweethearts, Hashimoto, the tea-house keeper, was trying to solve a problem—a very difficult problem apparently, if one might have judged from the contortions of his extraordinarily unlovely face as he pored over the book he held in his hand.

Suki the fortune-teller had sold it to him as a complete guide in the art of love-making; but, to tell the truth, the more Hashimoto read the more difficult did that most difficult task appear.

He must get away to a quiet place and read it all over again; of course, as Suki had reminded him, these things required practice.

So immersed was he in starting afresh on that uphill task that he never noticed the flutter of gay kimonos amongst the trees to his right, or saw bright eyes peeping at him from between the leaves.

Mitsu's geisha troupe was getting decidedly bored with its holiday. After all it was not *very* amusing seeing the soldiers off. There were too many weeping wives and sweethearts about to-day, and the men were so busy consoling them that they had no

"FUJIWARA, WE SHALL SAIL WITH THE TIDE"

"O HANA SAN, MY GUESTS AWAIT YOU. GO"

time to spare for a bit of fun with gay little geisha girls.

So, bent on mischief, they hid behind the trees watching Hashimoto coming tramping along, his long, straight hair sticking out round his head in the most curious fashion, whilst every now and then he gave his spectacles a push to keep them steady on his squat nose.

"I wonder," whispered Yanogi, "whether there's any truth in Suki's tale that Hashimoto is to marry a rich wife."

Saucy little Giku tossed her head. "Suki's so confiding he even believes his own lies," she retorted.

"Here he comes," cried Fugi, squeezing Sumako's arm. "Hide closer—closer, girls."

Yanogi laughed rather boisterously. "No need to hide from him. He never looks at any woman," she replied.

Hashimoto was plunging vigorously into problems again when there was a sudden patter of tabi'd feet, the flutter of many coloured kimonos and bright obis, whilst the next moment he found himself in the midst of a whirling, dancing company of geisha.

He stood still, pushing his spectacles over his forehead, whilst staring at the pretty, laughing faces in disgust.

"More women!" he groaned. "They're worse than flies."

A burst of gay laughter answered him. The geisha, having found some one to tease, were happy.

"I suppose," said Hashimoto, rubbing his knees, "you are really doing this to fascinate me?"

"Of course," laughed Giku; "that is just what we want to do."

Hashimoto jerked himself up with an air of triumph. He was evidently beginning to understand women.

"Yes," he murmured, "women are fools. But I suppose a man can't ever get rid of them until he gets to heaven."

Yanogi made a grimace. "You bear!" she scolded.

But Sumako, hot and breathless, had stopped her dancing. "What's that book you're reading?" she asked curiously.

Hashimoto smiled knowingly. After all, these silly little geisha might teach him something—above all, he wanted to talk.

"If you must know," he replied, "it is a book Suki sold me. *The Art of Love-making*—a guide to youthful lovers."

The geisha nudged each other, hiding laughter behind their fans.

"You're not in love, are you?" asked Fugi, the youngest of the troupe.

"That's what I'm trying to find out," explained Hashimoto earnestly. "What is it that makes me so clever? Because I'm *always* studying and finding out. Why, there are bits in this book that fit me like my hat. For instance: 'The true lover will not only value the Object of his Passion, but all that belongs to her.' Well, that's the piece that makes me think I must be in love, because it wasn't

till I heard 'all that belongs to her' that I saw any difference between her and any other old female."

Ko-Matsu pursed her lips in shocked amusement.

"Fie, Hashimoto, you love her for her money," she reproved, whilst the other geisha giggled behind their fans.

Hashimoto blinked, with a sly, sleek air which was highly entertaining to the geisha.

"What else do you suppose would make a fool of such a man as me?" he asked. "Of course *you* may not have noticed—being so dull in the head yourselves—but I'm very clever with my brains."

"Of course," they chorused; "we all know that."

Hashimoto was beginning to think geisha were not so bad after all. In fact, he grew quite confidential.

"It came to me like a flash," he explained. "A burst of wisdom, as you might say. It was the day I went to Tokyo—to buy some china for the tea-house. Well, I'd been thinking hard about the china—wondering whether I couldn't make the broken cups do by stopping the leaks with putty—and so when I got to the station I'd forgotten where I wanted to go. You see, I'd never been to Tokyo and couldn't remember the name. So I went to Suki and asked him where I wanted to go to. He got his divining-rod and his crystal, and he looked a long time, and then he told me the best thing I could do was to go home."

The geisha clapped their hands.

There was no doubt as to Hashimoto's cleverness in entertaining them.

"Well," asked Sumako, when she could speak for laughing, "did you go?"

Hashimoto sighed.

"I found," he said, "I'd been thinking so hard about where I was going to, that I'd forgot where I lived. So he had another look into his crystal—and had to charge me another fee—and after gazing a long time, he told me all about it."

"Well?" queried Yanogi.

There was a long pause.

"Well," went on Hashimoto, "it turned out I lived next door. In fact, I'd been to him only a few minutes before to buy a charm to prevent me from getting lost. Powerful charm it was, too; for, you see, I didn't get lost after all, and very likely I should if I'd gone to Tokyo."

"But the Object of your Passion?" asked Sumako impatiently. "You seem a long time in getting to her."

"Oh yes, I was going to tell you, was I not? Of course! But thinking always makes me forget. It was Suki told me all about her."

"And he knows you're after her?"

Hashimoto laid his fingers on his lips. "No, no. I've asked him to write a love-letter for me, but he doesn't suspect it's meant for her. It's wonderful how a man can be a fool and too big a fool to know it. Ah, a wise man like me can learn from a fool, but there isn't a fool living can learn anything from me."

He rubbed his knees as he spoke, whilst Sumako yawned, quite openly.

"We must be going to the temple, girls," she

said. "The soldiers are sure to be going there before leaving in the ship. At least the officers will. Come on, we may as well try to find some fun in this dull place."

Off they danced, one behind the other, giggling and laughing, impudent and daring, passing Suki the fortune-teller on their way.

But they wanted nothing with Suki this evening, especially after his impertinence in the morning. And, indeed, they had their suspicions that Suki talked too much to Mitsu, their mistress.

So Suki was allowed to pass on untormented to where Hashimoto stood immersed once more in *The Art of Love-making*.

Suki smiled. He had quite made up his mind that Hashimoto had a fortune hidden away somewhere—and fortune-taking was quite as much in Suki's line as fortune-telling. So he tapped the perplexed Hashimoto on the arm, with the greeting of an old friend.

"Ah, there you are," said he cheerfully.

Hashimoto looked gravely at him over his spectacles. He was feeling very worried over his self-analysis.

"Did you write that letter for me?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Suki amiably. "Who is it for?"

Hashimoto smiled cunningly. "Ah, I am too clever to tell you her name," he said. "Will you read me a few of your lies?"

Suki bowed as though he had received a great compliment. "I thank your august Superiority," he murmured.

"You're quite welcome," replied Hashimoto, returning the salutation.

Suki seated himself under an acacia tree and unrolled a voluminous strip of paper.

"It begins," he said, "'Sweet little Cherry-blossom of my eye.'"

Hashimoto was nothing if not literal. He too sat down beside the poetic Suki, and rubbed his head.

"But she isn't little," he complained. "And she isn't a blossom. She is full blown as a cabbage and round as a barrel."

Suki looked shocked. Evidently the gods had forgotten to endow Hashimoto with any spirit of romance.

"My august sir," he urged, "I thought from what you said that you understood: no woman will ever take *you* if you merely stick to facts."

Hashimoto looked a trifle sheepish.

"Of course," he murmured; "I'm forgetting. Go on."

"Listen," commanded Suki, waxing more eloquent over his own oration. "I've run into poetry here—

"When first my eyes beheld thy face, I thought I'd have a fit;
When thy plump charms and chubby grace, fell on my heart, it split;
I gazed and sighed, and sighed and gasped, and gazed and gasped again,
But gazed and sighed, and sighed and gasped, and gazed and gasped in vain."

To say Hashimoto was impressed by this flow of poetic genius would scarcely convey the correct state of his bewildered mind. He stared wonderingly at Suki.

"I seem to be a bit of a gasper, don't I?" he inquired. "What else?"

"You pay ten yen," he said, with businesslike brevity. "Then you give her the letter, buy her some presents, and she's yours."

"Yes," said Hashimoto the practical; "I see in the book you sold me, that 'A lover should be constantly buying gifts to prove his love.' But that isn't my idea at all; *my* idea is to be loved for myself alone."

Suki frowned. "That may not be as easy as you think," he said. "Besides, what's going to comfort her when you're out of sight?"

Hashimoto rolled over on his side. "I hadn't thought of that," he said. "I must consider it." He scrambled to his feet. "Anyhow I'll take her the letter," he added. "It's much better to do one thing at a time."

Suki yawned after the retreating figure.

"We're going—to make money out of Hashimoto," he muttered. "I wonder where Mitsu is! She's looking for him, I know. It would be certainly better for me to bring them together. Mitsu must get the cash out of him, or those miserably grasping little geisha will go on strike."

He jumped up and followed Hashimoto up the hill.

CHAPTER VII

A MATTER OF I.O.U.'S

Would he be coming again to the temple on the hill-top—or had that been a last farewell?

A last farewell!

Hana San shivered a little. The spring sunshine had all gone now, and darkness would soon be falling.

She sighed, thinking of what the new dawn would be without the possibility of seeing Fujiwara again. It seemed so absurd to recall that scarcely a week ago she had never seen him.

And now? Why, as she had told him, life only seemed to have begun a week ago. The lotus bud had opened its white leaves to the kisses of the sun, and shown the heart of gold. But when the sun had gone—why, it would be very dark.

If only he would come just for a moment. She did not wish to speak to him, although there was so very, very much her heart could have told had she dared bring its whispers to her lips. But she would be satisfied to look—to see his brave, noble face, to watch the smile deepen in his eyes—to know, in the eloquence of silence, that she had his love.

Poor little mousmé. Knowing nothing of the great world without, no wonder her dreams were of the ideal rather than reality, enshrining a lover in

the hallowed depths of her heart's temple. And she would be content—quite content to worship humbly and gratefully at that shrine all her life—for Hana San had not had an English mother like pretty wilful little Miyo, who wanted *her* lovers at her own dainty feet, so that she might tease and play with them all the day like a sportive kitten.

As Miyo sometimes regretfully observed, "Hana took life too seriously, and wanted more spirit of her own."

But Hana was not lacking in spirit—only it had been asleep so long in these peaceful temple courts, and all was strange in the great awakening which had come with the coming of Fujiwara.

Wrangling voices raised in scolding tones were heard approaching.

Hana stepped quickly into the cottage, hiding behind the shoji. She did not want these people, whoever they were, to see her. As far as her gentle nature could betray anger, she felt it towards those who had come to spoil that sweet reverie which was still half expectation.

She had so hoped Fujiwara might return for one last word—a last look—a last smile of remembrance.

And instead it was that big, stout woman, Mitsu, whom Miyo had told her was mistress of the geisha troupe that had invaded her peaceful solitude with its noisy laughter and drum-beating more than once to-day, annoying her with their bold stares and unkindly whispers.

She herself had looked at them with vague curiosity and the natural shrinking of a modest nature

from these flaunting, mocking-eyed little butterflies, whose business it was to attract attention and admiration rather than shrink from it with maidenly bashfulness.

And Mitsu was not alone—there was Suki the fortune-teller beside her. Suki who had even *dared* to suggest telling *her* fortune! She had reproved him gravely, yet had been conscious all the same of a weak desire to know what the reading of the stars would be in the story of her fate.

Yet it was not Suki whom Mitsu was quarrelling with, but a third man, whom Hana did not know—for Hashimoto had not been to the temple yonder.

Poor Hashimoto! His dreams of disinterested love were being rudely dispelled at the moment.

"My geisha threaten to go on strike if they don't get something on account," Mitsu was complaining shrilly. "I must have some money."

Hashimoto, driven to extremity, produced a handful of papers.

"If I am miserably permitted," he groaned. "Here are some I.O.U.'s. Will your Augustness help yourself?"

"Honourably permit," suggested Suki suavely. "She prefers cash."

Hashimoto looked wildly round. "There's been no cash here since the soldiers came except these," he replied, waving his papers. "We're all living on each other's debts."

Mitsu stamped her feet with impatience.

"But Suki told me you were rich," she cried.

Hashimoto stopped short, his cunning little eyes opening wide in perplexity.

"That's just what he told me about you!" he replied.

"Me!" Mitsu fanned herself violently. "I haven't a sen!" she declared. And her emphatic utterance conveyed conviction.

"No money?" echoed the tea-house keeper. "Well, I call that disgraceful." His hand stole to his blouse. "I shan't give her the letter after all," he thought to himself. "A good thing I learnt this first."

"Honourably permit," interposed the amiable Suki. "I hate to interfere in other people's business. But—— You mean to tell me you haven't any money at all?"

"Only these I.O.U.'s," replied Hashimoto, extending the dirty sheaf of papers with a dismal gesture.

"I call it simply wicked," screamed Mitsu—and she glared at Suki, who had slunk off like a whipped cur.

"Wicked!" echoed Suki from behind Hashimoto's back.

"Disgraceful!" cried Hashimoto.

"Swindle! Cheat! Humbug!" gasped Mitsu, clenching her fat fists as though meditating an assault on the disappointing and disappointed Hashimoto.

Hana was peeping from the cottage, longing to escape back to the peace of the temple courts. But she quickly drew back.

Fujiwara himself, with Captain Yamaki immediately behind him, was climbing up the slope.

Hana's heart beat very fast indeed as she pushed back the shoji.

She had seen Captain Yamaki before, and taken an instinctive dislike to him. Why had he followed Fujiwara here?—and why——?

Meditation was broken by Hashimoto's harsh tones striking in on listening ears. The little group of three had drawn quite close to the cottage, and was evidently watching the two young officers as they approached.

"There is one man has money, and he owes me two thousand yen," sighed Hashimoto.

Suki's hand stole caressingly on to the speaker's shoulder.

"Where is the little ewe lamb?" he gurgled.

"This is he," replied Hashimoto. "The officer who gave the dinner-party last night. Now I will do my miserable best to get the cash before he goes. I shall certainly never see it again if he once sails."

Suki nodded, giving the bashful Hashimoto a push forward which sent him reeling almost against Captain Yamaki's august personage.

The Captain stopped—so did Fujiwara, only then aware of who had been following him up the hill.

Hashimoto was busy kowtowing and rubbing his knees before his debtor.

"I beg your honourable pardon," he stammered, "but could you make it augustly convenient to pay me the two thousand yen for last night's entertainment?"

Yamaki scowled, but he drew out a handful of notes without hesitation, and began counting them.

Mitsu, Hashimoto and Suki all watched the counting with greedy eyes. At last they were in the way of securing something more profitable than I.O.U.'s.

As usual, Suki could not long remain silent. He made low salutation to Fujiwara, who was waiting merely because he wanted to find out what purpose Yamaki had in following him, and if possible succeed in getting rid of him before going up to the shrine to pay a last farewell to Hana.

"How I envy you, most august Captain," sighed the loquacious Suki. "Would that I were going with you! Why, I was all over the Chinese War. I know every pass and every road in Manchuria."

Yamaki paused in the counting of his notes, recalling the fortune-teller who had been so free with his tongue before General Okubo.

"By the way, my man," he said menacingly, "if you didn't know quite so much, it might be better for you."

Suki's expression was innocence itself.

"I hope I wasn't indiscreet with the General, your Superiority," he murmured. "I'm usually so miserably careful about interfering with other people's business. Now, if I'd told the old gentleman that Captain Fujiwara here lost three thousand yen——"

"Three thousand yen!" Captain Yamaki ceased counting the notes, and slipped them back into his pocket. "Ah, yes. Three—thousand yen."

He smiled very significantly as he repeated the words. An idea had struck him, inspired by Suki's suggestion.

Then he turned to Hashimoto after scribbling down a few words on a piece of paper.

"I owe you two thousand yen," he said suavely. "But I'm rather short of cash. Here's an I.O.U. for three thousand. You can keep the change."

Hashimoto collapsed. Hope had been so high. Expectation so nearly fulfilled, and now—*another I.O.U!*

Mitsu and Suki were equally disappointed.

Yamaki smiled with the keenest amusement at sight of their blank looks.

"It will be all right," he said easily. "It is the General's order that all debts must be paid before we leave. Fujiwara, will you give them the cash? It's your little card debt of last night."

It was Fujiwara's turn to look aghast.

"But——" he stammered, "I can't pay now."

Yamaki laughed—quite musically, and with evident enjoyment.

"Then the poor but dishonest tradesman will have to wait," said he. "Sayonara!"

He turned away, the echo of his mocking laughter and farewell floating back to where that little group of four were standing.

It was thus Captain Fujiwara should pay for being the *model* held up by his General for his *superior officers* to copy from.

Fujiwara himself realized the meaning of the trick —and its only too probable consequences. The General was a man of his word, and had vowed to degrade any officer who lowered the honour of the regiment by incurring debts which he could not pay.

"The scoundrel!" he muttered, and turned to Hashimoto, who, with the ready aid of Mitsu and Suki, was prepared to press his claim.

"I have no present means of redeeming this paper," he explained, steadying his voice as well as he could. "Can you wait?"

"I can't," replied Hashimoto emphatically, being inspired by sundry digs in the ribs from Suki. "It seems to be the only bit of real money in the place!"

Fujiwara straightened himself—had his eyes not been dimmed by that despairing dread which threatened so unexpectedly to overwhelm him, he might have seen a small, white face peering at him through the shoji.

"Your need is urgent?" he asked hoarsely.

A chorus of three answered him.

"It's miserably desperate, Augustness."

"Then I must get the money. The General will lend it if I explain. It will only cost me my career, my honour, and—my life."

It was more to himself he spoke than to those three who fell back to let him pass, nudging each other gleefully at the prospect of getting cash at last. Little did Fujiwara guess, however, that a fourth listener had heard—and understood the full bitterness of that last sentence.

No sooner was the young officer out of sight than the shoji was pushed back and Hana San stepped out from the cottage.

She looked round her in dazed fashion, stretching out her little hands with the groping gesture of a sleep-walker. In her soft, dove-coloured draperies

she looked like some fair spirit from another world.

Mitsu's gaze was critical and covetous. What a fortune there was in that slim little mousmé. She recalled Suki's careless words of engaging the holy miko as a geisha with much bitterness. A girl with such a face, figure and voice was a fortune to any one.

But what was the matter with her? Was she ill, or——?

Hana's dark eyes were filled with tears, her outstretched arms seemed to supplicate some unseen judge.

"He said it would cost him his career, his honour and his life. Help me to save him."

She was looking, unconsciously, towards Hashimoto.

The tea-house keeper, however, was not to be cajoled by any dark-eyed mousmé, lovely and ethereal though she might be.

"That's all very well," he said, as though in answer to a question, "but——"

"We are all ruined unless we get the money," interposed Mitsu vigorously. But there was an eager little twinkle in her shrewd eyes as she watched Hana.

It needs a woman to guess a woman's thoughts. Tip-toeing, she whispered to Suki, who was standing a little apart.

"I would give my life to buy that paper," said Hana, clasping her hands, and looking at the little scrap of flimsy paper which Hashimoto clutched so jealously.

"You mean that?" questioned Suki suavely, advancing towards her. "You would give your life to save him?"

It was the professional whine of the fortune-teller which he adopted.

Could such an one really help her? Hana turned to him eagerly.

"Gladly," she cried, "joyfully. The priest has taught me that. Does he not always say 'The duty and strength of a woman lies in self-sacrifice'?"

Suki drew himself up, softly patting his chest. There was no need for the divining-rod this time.

"Honourably permit," he said gravely, "it is all as simple as Hashimoto here. To save Captain Fujiwara you sign a bond to join Mitsu's geisha troupe."

Hana looked bewildered. Then slowly shook her head.

"I do not understand," she said. "But I will do anything you wish if it will save him."

It was Mitsu's own turn now for explanation.

"It only means dancing in a tea-house instead of a shrine," she said encouragingly. "You see, here is my card. 'Conducted on the strictest principles. Fun without vulgarity. Patronized by all the honourable nobility.'"

"And Mitsu will pay you three thousand yen on signing the bond," went on Suki, with amiable deference.

Mitsu sprang back with a little scream.

"Three thousand yen!" she cried. "Why, that piece of paper is all the money there is in the country."

"Precisely," agreed Suki, who had an excellent head for arithmetic. "Now, Hashimoto, you owe Mitsu two thousand yen. Why don't you pay her?"

Hashimoto stared; he was by this time so hopelessly muddled that he stood in some danger of never getting his ideas straight again.

"I've got no money," he replied, "except——"

"Precisely," agreed the cheerful Suki. "So give her the paper. Now she *is* paid. And there is just a trifle over to pay me for *my* services."

"Yes," said Mitsu, staring down at Captain Fujiwara's I.O.U. "But I've only got this scrap of paper."

"Precisely," agreed Suki, growing more and more elated at his own cleverness. "And now you want to give three thousand yen to Hana Ko to engage her as a geisha."

"Yes, but I've got no money except——"

"Precisely. Give that paper to Hana."

Mitsu obeyed. Light was beginning to dawn on her slow understanding.

"Now," said Suki, rubbing his hands, "you, Hashimoto, are paid. You, Mitsu, are paid. And you, Hana Ko, are paid. I'm—well—a trifle overpaid. And when Hana has signed the bond, Captain Fujiwara's debt is paid too!"

"It makes me dizzy," said Mitsu, rubbing her eyes with the back of plump knuckles. "All *that* done with this scrap of paper?"

"But how shall I save Captain Fujiwara's life with this?" asked Hana slowly, as she held out the paper in question.

"Send it back to him," said Suki briskly; "that is all."

Mitsu began to laugh. "He *is* wonderful, after all," she declared. "He's paid everybody, and *nobody* a penny the richer!"

"I don't know about that," retorted Hashimoto, as he stared across to where Hana was standing, still half dazed in her bewilderment. "You have got the mousmé. She'll be a fortune to you."

Mitsu nodded. She was well aware of the truth of that statement, and in fact could hardly believe her good fortune.

Suki was not letting the grass grow under his feet.

"You sign here," he said to Hana, "and the deed is done."

Hana knelt down on the cottage step and did as she was requested.

Through a mist of unshed tears she watched the movement of her own hand.

Was this her death warrant?

For a moment her heart beat fast in great sickening throbs—but whether from despair or exultation she could not tell.

Some such feeling might have inspired the Indian widows of former days, when they offered themselves as *sutee* on their husbands' funeral pyres.

As Suki had said, the deed was done. She had sold herself as a geisha to that loud-voiced, bold-faced woman over there. But Captain Fujiwara was saved!

She smiled through her tears.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PRICE PAID

"Miyo!"

"Hana San! Why, what are you doing here, so far from the shrine? Ah, I understand. You have come to say good-bye to him. I am so glad. And—and there is Makei—dear little Makei. I do want to tell him again not to throw himself in the way of needless danger. He is such a child, you know—and I don't know what he will be up to without *me* to look after him. Not that I am going to say that to him now, for he has been teased enough to-day, and oh! Hana anata, I cannot bear to think of those terrible Russians. If only the war could be stopped and there was no need to say good-bye! And though Makei talks a great deal about being glad to go, I don't believe it one bit, and never, never shall. But, Hana, what is the matter? Why do you look so strange, and your hands are cold—so cold?"

Hana drew a deep breath, and her eyes were shining.

"I have saved Captain Fujiwara from disgrace and death," she whispered.

Miyo's blue eyes were round with wonder. Surely this was a new Hana whom she scarcely knew!

"But—how?" she asked.

"He owed a gambling debt to Captain Yamaki. He had no money. Your father had said—had said he would degrade any officer who left dishonourable debts behind. So I—I have paid it by joining Mitsu's geisha troupe."

And poor Hana hid a shamed face in her long sleeves.

But Miyo was too gay and volatile a little lady to realize the tragedy of this announcement.

"You are to be a geisha?" she cried, clapping her hands. "To wear silken sashes and coral combs, and have all the men in Tokyo at your feet. How I envy you!"

Hana did not reply, and she turned away her head so that Miyo should not read what was in her eyes.

"Will you give him this?" she asked presently, drawing a piece of paper from the little pocket in her sleeve. "That is why I came in search of you, Miyo Ko."

"But what is it? And why don't you give it to him yourself?"

"I shall not see him. I shall never see him again."

"Hana San, what nonsense you talk. Did you not come down on purpose to see him off?"

"No, no. I came to see you. You must give him that paper at once—do you not understand, little Miyo? I cannot explain it, but it is the paper that was to bring him shame and ruin. *He must never know that I redeemed it.* Above all that. Never, never. If he did I could never survive the shame; and he—ah! what would not his feelings be? But he shall never know."

Miyo was grave enough now, and her warm young arms were twined round the other girl who was her friend, and who suffered now some terrible grief that the child Miyo could not understand, for all her boasting that it was she who was the woman of the world.

It appeared to Miyo that Hana had been learning a great many things in this very short time, which had taken her much farther than she herself along the road of the world's knowledge.

So she kissed Hana's sad face and promised anything and everything in a breath, though she could not quite understand *why* Hana was going to be a geisha and never, never see Captain Fujiwara again.

"I will go now, this very minute," she promised. "But where are you going, Hana? What are you going to do?"

"I am going back to tell Kieki. To bid him and the dear temple farewell. I think Kieki will understand. He taught me always 'The duty and strength of a woman lies in self-sacrifice.'"

Miyo Ko sighed ever such a miniature sigh. "I do not like that teaching very much," she said. "But I am sure Captain Fujiwara will come back to you one day."

"He will come back to the temple, little Miyo. But there will be no miko to greet him. No Hana San to sing him songs of the beauty of peace and the whispered secrets of the birds and flowers; the temple courts—will be empty for Captain Fujiwara."

The words died away in a low sob, and yet, though Miyo's warm little heart was all on fire to

give comfort, and her lips trembling to whisper words of love and tenderness, she was wise enough to stand still by the lake-side, leaving Hana to go back alone to tell her tale in Kieki San's ears. But, when she was out of sight, Miyo Ko gave her head a toss and shook the dainty parasol which lay topsy-turvy at her feet—just as she would like to have shaken Captain Yamaki and all others who had brought such sorrow to her girl-friend's heart. And then—because she could not shake the real Yamaki or tell him her honourable opinion of his miserable treachery, she went hurrying off down to the shore where already a great crowd had assembled to send off the brave soldiers of the Emperor with cheers and acclamations.

Such a jostling, hurrying crowd. Khaki-clad soldiers, blue-bloused coolies, grey-kimono'd clerks, small tots of children in their bright red and yellow garments, with queer, bobbing-headed babies tied on to the backs of diminutive sisters by the native haori, or shawl. Geisha girls, too, laughing and jesting with the soldiers. Sad-eyed little mousmé in soft pinks and greys, waving their hands to brothers and lovers, and trying to display all the self-control which is the guiding principle of a Japanese woman's life.

Captain Yamaki was there, busy and alert, seeing that his men were safely aboard. He was smiling, this Captain Yamaki, for he was very rich, and he was beginning to realize more and more what a great deal of self-gratification money can purchase. Had he not had his pleasures? taken vengeance on a rival? found favour with the General? and finally

provided for any future contingencies by buying the proprietorship of the *Tokyo Review*—a paper which would be so soon chronicling the deeds of all Japanese heroes, and enlisting in his services that sharp-witted young journalist, Tanaka? This last stroke of genius had been an afterthought, yet one altogether worthy of its originator.

No wonder Yamaki boarded the ship with a feeling of absolute contentment. He went below at once, for all that sentimental leave-taking rather bored him than otherwise; and he did not exactly wish to be present when Fujiwara was disgraced—there might be awkward things said, and already Ito and that young fool Makei were looking at him askance. Ah, well! let them wait and see. It would not be *his* fault if the *Tokyo Review* did not resound with the heroic deeds of Captain Yamaki, who would return to Tokyo a full-blown Colonel at least, marry the General's daughter and settle down to as honourable a position as any miserable Samurai of them all!

Thus it was that Yamaki did not witness the little drama which was even then being played close by on the shore where the General was standing, surrounded by a group of officers and orderlies, giving final orders for embarkation.

So busy was General Okubo that he was quite unaware that his daughter was standing a few paces from him, with Suki the fortune-teller by her side.

To tell the truth, Miyo had been very glad to accept Suki's assistance in bringing her through the crowd.

It was all very exciting, this departure to the war,

but it left a mauve and white little mousmé, who ought to have been at home learning the lesson of the "three obediences," a little breathless and bewildered.

The loud laughter of the geisha, the weepings of disconsolate relations, the shouts and commands of men and officers all helped to confuse her.

And how *was* she going to find Captain Fujiwara?

According to Suki the fortune-teller, to whom she confided her trouble, nothing would be easier; and certainly she had hardly reached her father's side than she was aware of a tall figure in captain's uniform approaching him from an opposite direction.

And how fast the sight of that white, set face of misery made her heart beat!

Poor Captain Fujiwara! Poor, poor Hana!

"Before starting, General, I have to beg a favour——"

Fortunately for the speaker, General Okubo did not hear a word of that carefully begun little speech. He was talking to an orderly, and before Fujiwara could gain his attention, a slim little figure had slipped between.

"Not a word!" breathed Miyo imploringly. "Here is your I.O.U."

She was obliged to turn instantly to speak to her father, who was reproaching her tenderly for the unconventional daring, prompted, of course, by filial affection, which had brought her here to say goodbye again to him.

"But how——" stammered Fujiwara, who was

too completely nonplussed to understand what miracle had been performed in accomplishing his salvation.

"Hush," murmured the benevolent Suki in his ear. "*I* have arranged it all."

Fujiwara was staring at a dainty little figure which had contrived somehow to sidle up to Lieutenant Makei's side.

"I owe it to her?" he asked. "*She* has done this?"

"I have promised never to tell," replied Suki mysteriously. "And——"

"You were speaking to me just now, Fujiwara?" asked the General, turning sharply round.

Fujiwara hesitated.

Again Suki saved the situation.

"This noble fellow," said the young officer, indicating the smiling fortune-teller, "reminds me that I am under a deep obligation to him. He saved my life, and it would greatly please me to reward him."

"*This* man?" echoed General Okubo, in surprise. "Why, he is——"

"A hero of the Chinese War, sir. He tells me that he knows every secret pass in the mountains. He is burning to go back."

Suki turned pale and began edging away into the crowd, saying "the burning had been quenched."

But he was too late in making his escape.

"The noble fellow shall be rewarded," observed the General dryly. "Draft him in the Guides' Corps for special danger service."

Suki gave a deep groan.

"Danger service!" he echoed. "Oh, Mitsu! Mitsu!"

He was thinking of the dream of fortune which had seemed to dawn in the possession of the temple maid as a geisha girl.

And now—*special danger service*. But it was too late to draw back, and perhaps the fellow's natural bravado prevented him from making a final effort to escape.

Yet if only Mitsu were here! What would she say when she heard of this?

Already he was being hurried forward between two soldiers. He looked more like a condemned criminal going to the scaffold than a hero going to fight his country's battles. A chorus of laughter from above floated down to him. On a path near stood Mitsu's geisha troupe, a cluster of gay colourings against a dark background of trees.

"Good-bye, Suki!" they cried. "Brave, clever Suki! Are you really going to the war? Or is it only to tell the Russians their fortunes? Be sure you don't look too long in the crystal ball or they will eat you up and apologize after. Then what will Mitsu say? Poor Mitsu!"

The parrot chorus followed him to the waterside—

"Then what will Mitsu say? Poor Mitsu!"

And they were laughing—these girls—as though it were the best joke in the world that Suki the fortune-teller had been drafted at the last moment into the Guides' Corps for special danger service!

"What will Mitsu say? Poor Mitsu!"

There was a lump in Suki's throat as some one

gave him a friendly push forward into the boat that was to take him alongside.

Poor Mitsu! And if he were killed, what *was* the use of her making his fortune with Hana the singing-maid?

Unanswerable question for poor Suki, who had not one ounce of enthusiasm left in him at that enthusiastic moment when the band swelled louder and louder in triumphant melody, making accompaniment to hundreds of manly voices which sang out their good-bye to those ashore as the great ship slowly glided away over the waters.

> The troops are off to the war to-day,
> Drums are beating and bugles bray;
> Down at the crowded harbour-side
> The trooper swings on a flowing tide.
> Hark, the siren that seems to call
> "Sayonara! Good-bye to all!"
> Mark the cheering that makes reply,
> "Sayonara! Good-bye! Good-bye!"

On the shore, little Miyo San was weeping hysterically amidst hundreds of other weeping wives, mothers, sisters and daughters.

"Sayonara! Good-bye! Good-bye!"

Again and again the sweet echo of the words drifted back from the side of the great ship where men were crowding to wave a last farewell to those they left behind, many for the last time.

"Sayonara! Good-bye! Good-bye!"

The echo of the long, sweet plaint floating upwards reached a shadowed spot on the lonely hillside where a girl in dove-coloured robes knelt, with her dark head bowed to the ground, at the feet of an old priest.

Kieki was looking seawards—was it that he could see farther now than he had this morning into the mists of the future which hung upon a distant horizon?

It may have been so, for his gentle old face was full of sorrow, yet infinite patience, as he listened to the sobbing confession of the child who had grown so dear to him during those peaceful years.

"A geisha," moaned Hana San. "That is the bondage to which I have sold myself. A geisha! To live in a tea-house, the slave and plaything of its clients; the slave who must laugh and sing at her master's bidding even though her heart is breaking. And yet—it was for love's sake that I did it. To save him whom—I—had learnt to love. Say you forgive? Say you understand, before I say farewell for ever to this holy place?"

The old man bowed his head. He could no longer see the horizon, for there were tears in his eyes. It was very, very long since Kieki San had felt them there.

But here was a grief which called for pity far more loudly than death would have done.

Yet he spoke brave words to strengthen and help her in her need, even though his own heart was sore.

"I understand," said he. "The truest self is unselfishness. The highest merit is self-sacrifice. Thou hast found and practised the truest way."

Gently he bent and touched her head as though blessing her in his farewell. Then slowly—almost feebly—he climbed up the steps leading to the shrine.

But Hana San still lay crouching there, like some broken lotus blossom torn by stress of storm from parent bough.

Presently she rose, pushing back the hair from her forehead.

"Sayonara! Good-bye to all!"

The farewell cry reached her as she stood there, and she smiled even in her hour of pain and desolation.

Had he not gone in honour, with hope in his heart and dreams of youth, and love to strengthen him in battle?

What matter, then, that her life was broken, if, in pouring it out for love's sake, he was saved?

"The ship is going. Come and see!" cried the voice of Miyo-ko-San on the hill-side. "Oh, the beautiful ship!—how fast it seems to go! Sayonara! Sayonara!"

"Sayonara," echoed Hana San as she slowly bowed herself to mother earth in bereft abandonment.

CHAPTER IX

"THE DAUGHTER OF AN ENGLISH MOTHER"

"O-HAYO, Miyo San, and why is your honourable face so sad?"

There was a teasing note in the bright little voice even if the words were deferential.

Miyo rose, bowing and rubbing her knees in salutation; then she yawned—not at all a deferential proceeding, though what could you expect from the daughter of an English mother?—and finally broke into a merry, inconsequent laugh as she pulled O Fusa San down on to the mat beside her and then clapped her hands for her little maid to bring tea.

Truly tea and gossip are synonymous in Japan!

"My father is home," she began with a sigh.

O Fusa San nodded her head briskly.

"The honourable return," she said. "Did not your heart become as a singing-bird, Miyo, to welcome home such an august hero of illustrious deeds?"

Miyo shrugged her shoulders. "I wasn't thinking of that at all," she retorted, "but of that hateful Colonel Yamaki. Oh, I hate, I hate, I *hate* him!"

She was so enthusiastic over her hatred that she upset her little cup of saké on to the floor.

O Fusa San was immensely amused—she always *was* amused at Miyo-ko-San, who was quite unlike any other mousmé in Tokyo—or, for the matter of that, in all Japan. She was also just a trifle malicious.

"The honourable Colonel," she murmured, "of whose praises all Tokyo is ringing. Why, Miyo San, there is not a mousmé throughout the city who is not dying of jealousy. Now tell me, when will the 'first-glance meeting' be arranged? You must tell me all about it, for I could not rest a moment till I had ordered the 'ricksha and come to hear."

Miyo frowned—she did not often frown, for she preferred to laugh; but who *could* laugh when anything so distasteful was being discussed as the approaching mi-ai or betrothal between herself and Colonel Yamaki? Why, her little cousin Makei, though he was only a boy, was worth twenty of him, and she was quite, quite determined that she should run right away rather than allow herself to be married to such a hateful husband. O Fusa San, however, would not listen to a word of her objections.

Of course, many mousmé talked like that *before* the "first seeing." Afterwards when she had been presented with the morsel of obi silk which constitutes a Japanese girl's betrothal ring, and had actually seen her future honourable master, Miyo would not talk so wildly of disobeying her father, but would begin to think of her trousseau like any other sensible girl.

O Fusa San was busy getting her own trousseau, and found Miyo's matrimonial prospects soon led

into expatiations on her own. It was *such* fun going to the shops and drinking tea all day whilst the honourable vendors of silks and obis spread their wares before their august patrons.

O Fusa San wanted to tell Miyo all about it, and Miyo did not want to listen one bit. It would, she felt sure, bore her intensely to kneel in a stuffy little shop all day, drinking saké and looking at silks of every hue and design under the sun.

As to obis, she had ten of them already—*beauties,* which had been saved every year since she was five years old—an age when childhood ends and girlhood begins with the wearing of the first sash or obi.

In vain O Fusa prattled on about the beauty of her combs, and the good fortune she was having in marrying an orphan. It is a mousmé's most cherished ambition to marry an orphan, for then she does not have to become the slave of her mother-in-law, as is otherwise the case.

Colonel Yamaki's mother was a lady quite celebrated for her captious temper. O Fusa San began to recount tales she had heard of her ill-humour with the utmost relish, for, if Miyo-ko was so disagreeable as to show no interest in *her* good fortune, she at least should listen to her own ill prospects.

It was, however, an unlucky choice of subject. Miyo San *almost* lost her temper, though her language was intensely polite and flowery. But she wanted the honourable mousmé who had designed to visit her miserable unworthiness to understand that she did not intend to marry Colonel Yamaki,

and that no power on earth would ever, ever make her change her mind. As to the book on the *Greater Learning of Women,* with its nonsensical talk of the three obediences, her own mother had called it ridiculous, and so did she—and she never, never meant to be obedient to any one, so there!

Blue eyes were flashing in quite unmistakable fashion during this very plain speaking, and though O Fusa San smiled in an indulgent manner, and sipped her saké in the most refined way, she was inexpressibly horrified at this most outrageously unheard-of talk on the part of the honourable General Okubo's daughter.

She was so anxious to go on to call upon other distinguished friends in Tokyo and tell them all that Miyo San had been saying, and how that she was sure the Mi-ai between the hero Colonel Yamaki, who had been promoted for capturing a fort from the Russians at the risk of his life, and little Miyo-ko San, the General's daughter, would never come off. Colonel Yamaki, poor man, would certainly not want a wife who said and did such outrageous things as that spoilt child, for whom she could not help being sorry in spite of her shocking behaviour.

That was the effect Miyo had had on O Fusa San; and the effect O Fusa San had had on Miyo was nearly as bad. It had roused in her a sense of her own impotence in escaping fate, and that, too, in spite of her exaggerated words of bravado.

Had not her father arranged a Mi-ai for the very next day? And a Mi-ai there would have to be.

Poor little mousmé. The very idea of that "first

seeing" was abhorrent to her. She hated Colonel Yamaki quite enough without having seen him at all.

But what should she do?

The question was answered by herself in most daring fashion. Why should she not go and talk it all over with Hana San?—the friend of her childhood and girlhood; the only friend, indeed, who had ever won wayward little Miyo's confidence.

The bright flush mounted to her pretty cheeks at the thought, a daring one indeed!

For a whole year Hana San had been a geisha: the head geisha of Mitsu's famous troupe at the Garden of Sweet Content—the fine new tea-house in which Mitsu had established herself at Tokyo.

Hana San had made Mitsu's fortune, as Suki the fortune-teller had prophesied. And that was why Mitsu had been able to buy the pretty tea-house with its twining wistaria blooms and dainty gardens, just outside Tokyo.

Miyo drew a deep breath and hesitated. It was a whole year since Hana and she had so much as met. Would her friend have changed? The life of a geisha was so different from that of a holy miko —and Hana had become still more famous in this new calling. She was the most sought after geisha in Japan. Quite a grand personage, thought Miyo, and wondered if she really dared venture alone through the streets of Tokyo as far as the Garden of Sweet Content!

Of course, if her father knew he would be very, very angry. It was quite an unheard-of thing for a well-born mousmé to venture near so question-

able a place as a public tea-house. Yet had not Hana San been living in one for a whole year?

Miyo nodded her bright little head, and laughed defiantly to herself.

Anyhow she was sure to make her father angry with her soon, for mi-ai or no mi-ai, she did not mean to marry Colonel Yamaki!

She did not expect her father's anger to last long, either, whatever she did. She only had to cry a little and coax a great deal, with two soft arms round his neck, and she could wheedle him into the best of humours again in a trice.

After such considerations Miyo did not take long to make up her mind.

Tiptoeing cautiously across the room she ran down the passage and out into the street. She did not often go out into the streets except in a ricksha to make her ceremonious calls, or go to a solemn tea ceremony, and never had she been out alone and unchaperoned before. The naughtiness of the exploit commended it still more to her wayward mood. And she positively *must* go and see Hana San.

She knew the way quite well, and hurried along quickly. She did not want people to stare at her or speculate on who she was and what she was doing. Yet she could not help being interested in all she saw. It was so different from her father's quiet home at Tsumura, where he owned a beautiful park quite close to the temple where O Hana San had once lived.

With curious eyes she watched the coolies hurrying along at a swing trot between the shafts of the

rickshas, and paused a moment with pitying eyes for the blind musician creeping along close to the houses twanging his samisen. Before her a party of women were hurrying on their way to the market, their clogs clattering louder than their tongues, whilst the soft greys and browns of their kimonos swayed to and fro with that rhythmic movement so peculiarly fascinating to watch.

Miyo laughed as she glanced down at her own dainty person, clad in soft white and blue this time, with lilac blooms worked into the fabric of her kimono and wide soft obi of mauve colour too.

She longed to peep behind the blue cotton curtains hung from a bamboo pole which screened the low shop fronts from the street; but there was no time for shopping to-day. She was going on a mission of far greater importance.

Then the children—why, the streets swarmed with them, gay little butterflies of creatures darting hither and thither in their scarlet and yellow kimonos!

Tiny deputy mothers playing vigorous games of battledore and shuttlecock with resigned atoms of humanity fastened to their backs. Some of the babies slept through it all—jumping, leaping, bounding, stumbling—others watched the play with solemn black eyes and nodding heads, whilst helping to keep themselves in place with tiny hands clutching and wee feet scratching and scrambling. Wonderful babies! learning from these insecure resting-places the more wonderful lesson of self-control and resignation which were to sustain them through life.

Miyo had smiles for every shaven-crowned youngster, and would like to have bestowed kisses on every baby, but she was in such a hurry.

It was getting late already—and there, yes, there to the right, close to the lake-side, stood the Garden of Sweet Content—Mitsu's famous tea-house—the home now of O Hana San.

Even the intrepid little Miyo paused a moment, catching back her breath in a gasp at her own temerity.

Should she *dare* enter there after all? And oh! what would her cousin Makei say if he saw her now?

CHAPTER X

THE GARDEN OF SWEET CONTENT

A SHRILL peal of girlish laughter and the tinkling of the samisen, followed by quick chatter of eager little tongues, with an occasional deeper note in a man's voice.

Such a hot, sultry afternoon it was—with distant mountain peaks, seen from the garden of the tea-house, bathed in a purple glow.

Beneath them, beyond the terraces, lay the lake, calm, mysterious, beautiful. But the scene in the garden itself was gay and varied enough, without any of the solemn touch given by the view of lake and mountain, with intervening paddy-fields, winding streams and quaint, picturesque bridges, with clustering pines growing close to high banks.

The cherry-blossoms were a-blow, too, in the orchards, for, as Miyo San had said, it was a whole year since the great ship had carried away the brave sons of Japan to the war. And now the war was over—most honourably over—and the soldiers of the Emperor had returned from far Manchuria, bringing with them the admiration and wonder of the whole civilized world in their hour of victory.

It was not only that the Russians were defeated, but honourably defeated by the most magnanimous of foes.

So Japan was rejoicing rightfully in her triumph, whilst the tales of brave deeds were told and re-told, and many more worshipful ghosts were added to the kamidana, or god-shelf, in every Shinto household, and many mothers wept for joy because their sons had died so worthily for their country.

But in the fashionable Tokyo tea-house, with geisha girls and lazily contented clients, all the talk was accompanied by gay laughter, jest and raillery.

A Garden of Sweet Content indeed was that—so daintily situated, with its clambering blossoms trailing tasselled ends over every possible nook and corner of the house—though pale wistaria was outshone and entirely outrivalled by the gay little human blossoms who knelt on their mats, flirting their fans, twanging their samisens, or moving idly to and fro in a moment of leisure between their dancings.

In the meantime, dainty little tea-house girls were bringing out diminutive trays with cups of saké and cakes of beanflour for the consumption of the honourable gentlemen who reclined at ease on their mats, smoking comfortably and chatting idly to the gorgeous little geishas, who in the intervals of dancing smoked too. All the women smoke in Japan—even if they happen to awake in the night—but the pipes only contain tobacco enough for three whiffs, and then have to be tapped to knock the ashes out, so there is not much repose about it!

Presently the dancing recommenced to the twanging of biwa and koto; there was much shuffling of tabi'd feet, much fluttering of brilliant-hued

kimonos, much applause. Then more talk, more gossip, more laughter.

So the afternoon wore away in laziest contentment —to the ever-increasing profit of Mitsu, the mistress of the Garden of Sweet Content—and still more famed for being the mistress of the wonderful O Hana San, the singing geisha girl.

Not that Hana was present this afternoon, being too rare a lotus-bud to be proffered to the ordinary afternoon clients; and, as far as it went, Mitsu was absent too—on important business, you may be sure—for was it not the solemn ceremony of *san-san-do*, that mysterious saké-drinking from three little saké cups with two spouts, which constitutes the marriage ceremony of Japan?

As for the bridegroom—well, well! he might have been more honourably eligible, it is true, for so important a person as the mistress of the Tokyo tea-house; but then Mitsu wished to run no risks in the matrimonial market; and since Suki was dead—poor Suki! who had gone to the war at the last minute so sorely against his will—Mitsu felt it best to console the amorous Hashimoto before he committed suicide in his despairing passion.

A young man in blue silk kimono, his face bronzed by the sun, his eyes quick of gaze and sparkling with intelligence, strolled into the tea-house.

It was Tanaka the journalist, who wrote so fluently for the *Tokyo Review*, and who had become quite famous in minor fashion for the brilliant description he had given of the heroic exploits of Colonel Yamaki, who had slain, it appeared,

hundreds of Russians, seized a fort out of their very hands and from under their very noses, and altogether behaved as though he were the noblest of the Samurai, instead—— But no one just now troubled to get any farther than that, for Colonel Yamaki was the hero of the hour, thanks to his own gallantry and—indirectly—to the eloquent writing of Tanaka in the *Tokyo Review*.

Tanaka, quite aware of his own importance, ordered his tea and sat down on his mat, blowing kisses to little geishas right and left.

"Konnichi-wa, girls," he cried. "At what hour is the honourable Mitsu married?"

Giku nodded her pretty head laughingly. "You are too late, Tanaka San," she replied. "The happy despatch is over."

Tanaka yawned. "What? Couldn't Hashimoto wait?"

"No, poor man," retorted Sumako, laying aside her samisen and rising to her feet; "Mitsu wouldn't let him."

"*Poor man*, indeed!" laughed Tanaka, sipping his saké. "This marriage makes him master of this tea-house and all Mitsu's geisha troupe—including the great Hana."

"The great Hana," scoffed Sumako, whose jealousy had been fanned into hot flame since the day when she first saw Hana San at the shrine at Tsumura. "Conceited amateur! She doesn't even wear geisha dress." And she fingered the rich brocade of her own kimono.

"She was a miko in a shrine when Suki first found her," said little Giku in a half-whisper. She was

fond of Hana, who had been kind to her when she was ill, though she was too afraid of Sumako to show it.

"Poor Suki!" put in another girl, looking round. "*He* might have been master here if he had not been killed in the war."

"Yes," said Yanogi, with an air of great wisdom, "I'm sure Mitsu used to be fond of him; don't you think so, girls?"

Several geisha had joined the group round Tanaka. The prospect of a gossip was always dear to them.

"Dear old Mitsu!" yawned Tanaka. "She'll lead Hashimoto a pretty dance."

Sumako tossed her head, moving a few paces forward, with dancing steps.

"Why not?" she asked. "Dancing is her trade. By the way, Tanaka, you who have been to Europe and America, have you ever seen anything there to surpass the art of the Japanese geisha?"

She flashed her dark eyes at him, swaying to and fro, her fan held behind her dainty little head.

Tanaka rose, bowing. "Never to surpass—merely variations," said he. "Would you like me to show you?"

In a moment he was surrounded by laughing, irresponsible geisha, all thoughts of Mitsu, Suki—even the tiresome Hana—forgotten, as they joined in the fun of that dancing lesson.

Oh, but it was honourably amusing and exceedingly laughter-making to see that droll Tanaka dance that absurdly ridiculous dance which was all hops and skips and leg-kickings.

Certainly, they did not think Western dances would suit little geisha girls, with their stiff brocades and tightly-bound obis to hamper them in their extraordinarily puzzling leaping and bounding which Tanaka gravely informed them was the dance he had always seen when visiting Europe; and, in the midst of the fun, in came Mitsu herself, in gorgeous kimono of yellow silk—a fatter, more masterful, if possible more blooming Mitsu than she of a year ago. Prosperity evidently agreed with a healthy constitution.

Little geisha were gravely twanging their samisens, or dancing gracefully before the reclining clients in their long blue and grey kimonos, when Mitsu entered. Even Tanaka had subsided again on to his mat. He rose, with the weariest of airs, to bow to the mistress of the tea-house; but congratulations were cut into by her panting and breathless demand.

"Have you seen my Hashimoto? Ah, my honourable salutations to your Augustness. I see it is the clever gentleman of the *Tokyo Review*. You will honourably excuse. I cannot find my miserable husband anywhere, and I must see what he is doing. I can't bear him out of my sight to-day."

She went bustling off—a portentous figure in her yellow garments—enough to daunt the heart of any rebellious little geisha—or possibly of a rebellious husband.

"Poor Hashimoto!" laughed Tanaka in Sumako's shell-like ear. "He may even find the tea-house, including Hana, a dear bargain at the price."

As he spoke, the quaint head and long, lean neck

of Hashimoto was thrust cautiously round a corner of the shoji.

"Has she gone?" he whispered, in so tragic a tone that there was a tinkle of laughter from the geisha.

"Shall we call her?" asked Giku, with the most innocent air imaginable.

"No, no," implored the happy bridegroom, appearing bodily in their midst; "don't give me up."

"But she's looking for you," urged Tanaka in tones of raillery.

A sly expression crept over Hashimoto's simple face. "Yes, I know," he replied, with a chuckle. "But up to now I've been too quick for her."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Sumako, taking his arm and giving it a little shake with her dainty fingers. "You don't know what a treasure you have married."

"Don't I?" scoffed Hashimoto, beginning to recover himself—the ceremony of *san-san-do* having proved rather trying for his nerves. "Do you suppose a brainy man like me would ever have got his neck into this noose if he hadn't known about the treasure? It was this tea-house, and Hana, and Mitsu's savings that made me fall in love."

"You wretch!" cried Yanogi, laughing merrily as she struck him with her fan. "You don't deserve to have a wife."

Hashimoto rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "Well, that's what *I* was thinking," he said, in the tone of a man who makes a great discovery. "I've done nothing to deserve it."

He was still pondering over that problem when

Mitsu entered—and it was no use to hope to hide behind those tiresome geisha—they were too quick for him, and ran off, laughing, followed by admiring clients. Hashimoto drew a deep breath. He certainly *had* made a plunge this time, and he had forgotten to consult any fortune-teller after the departure of Suki to the wars.

Did he almost begin to wish that it had been he—not Suki—to go?

And he knew—yes, he was positive—Mitsu was going to make love to him! As she advanced at full sail across the tea-house gardens, with plump arms extended and plump face wreathed in smiles, he was sure of it.

Heedless of the tea-house, heedless of the fortune which had become his in the performance of that simple *san-san-do*, heedless of future consequences when Mitsu should again find him, Hashimoto turned and fled.

. . . . . .

A patter of tabi'd feet, the soft flutter of a white and blue kimono, a quick indrawing of breath, and Miyo came to a dead stop in the deserted court of the Garden of Sweet Content.

Oh, how frightened she had been—and those men—those impudently inquisitive men!—how *dared* they talk to her just as if—as if she were a little geisha girl, willing to sell her kisses for golden yen!

Miyo San grew scarlet with rage, clasping her hands back against her throbbing heart.

How glad she was to have escaped them—she only hoped they would not follow her here; but she

had given them the slip so cleverly, and they had gone off to look for her down by the lake-side. Miyo laughed in triumph. She had regained her breath and her courage now—besides, no one had guessed who she was, so no harm was done.

How curious they had been, those tea-house clients! How they had pursued her, demanding her name and where she lived. And they had actually dared to tell her this was no place for her!

No place for her indeed –when Hana lived here!

Well, she would make haste and go and find Hana and have that long, delightful talk, to obtain which she had braved so many dangers and her father's anger.

"*Miyo San!*"

Turning to enter the tea-house, Miyo had almost run into the arms of her cousin Makei.

The two stood staring at each other, Makei with horrified amazement on his face, Miyo at first embarrassed, then amused.

How augustly shocked poor Makei was! She suddenly remembered that she was enjoying herself, and quite as easily forgot her first fears on entering the tea-house garden.

"You *-here?*" demanded Makei in sepulchral tones.

Miyo bowed low in salutation, rubbing her knees with an affectation of most dutiful respect.

"I, here," she mocked. "Konnichi-wa, most honourable cousin, it is long since I had the pleasure of hanging on your honourable eyelids."

"Do you know, Miyo," said Makei seriously, "that this is a tea-house."

She flirted her fan with provoking mockery.

"My miserable intelligence has compassed that astounding fact," she replied tranquilly.

"And do you know," went on Makei, "that no well-brought-up mousmé ever yet entered a tea-house—without a chaperon, and entirely alone?"

Miyo twirled round on her toes. "I shan't be alone," she said sweetly. "I'm going to see Hana. I'm going now."

"Honourably permit," said Makei, barring the way. "Do you know your father would be augustly angry if he heard of this most outrageously foolish visit?"

"My honourable and illustrious father can't be angry about things he knows nothing of," laughed Miyo. "Never mind, Makei; I can take care of myself quite nicely."

She darted past him as she spoke, entering the tea-house and disappearing from view.

Makei looked after her with a frown. Certainly, if the English mother had failed in her duty with regard to her daughter's education, it would be necessary for a *husband*—and a husband of firm will and impressive personality, to take Miyo in hand and teach her how absolutely indispensable the lesson of the three obediences was to the daughter and wife of distinguished Japanese officers. It appeared that poor Makei had not heard yet of the mi-ai arranged for the morrow between the daughter of General Okubo and Colonel Yamaki.

CHAPTER XI

MIYO SAN FINDS HANA AGAIN

"O Hana San!"

"*Miyo*. Little Miyo-ko."

The two girls were in each other's arms with no more formal salutation than the cry of welcome.

"How good of you to come," whispered Hana breathlessly. "But—a tea-house! Your father——"

Miyo made a grimace. "Now, don't talk like Makei. I haven't come for a lecture, but advice, Hana. And you know I never could learn the lesson of the three obediences; besides, my father does not know."

Hana smiled. In her richly embroidered robes of the palest hues she looked lovelier than ever; but there was an expression of great and abiding sorrow in eyes which just now might look as they pleased, without being commanded to smile and laugh for the pleasure of tea-house clients.

"The same little madcap," she whispered, as the two girls knelt side by side on the floor of Hana's room. "You are as bright and welcome to me as the blossom of the cherry-trees in the spring."

Miyo kissed her tenderly.

"And you are just as sweet and fresh as the fragrance of drying tea," she declared. "Fancy!

It is over a year since we met! I suppose you have quite forgotten Captain Fujiwara?"

The colour flamed suddenly in pale cheeks at the unexpected allusion.

But Hana San did not even attempt to hide her secret from her little friend. To see her was like a breath of the old life stealing back to her, cool and fresh from the shaded groves on the hill-side.

And now that name—the name which nightingales sang to her over and over again whilst she listened, wakeful and burning-eyed through long night hours.

"Forgotten?" she breathed. "Not a word from his lips. Not a look of his eyes."

Miyo nodded cheerfully. "And now you are looking forward to see him again," she said.

Hana started. The very thought set her trembling with an ecstasy she hardly understood.

"To see him again?" she cried softly. "To see the light in his eyes, to hear the music of his voice, to thrill beneath his touch? Oh, Miyo, Miyo, you shouldn't—you shouldn't!"

She bowed her dark head, covering her small face with her hands.

"But the night is past," replied Miyo tenderly—already forgetful of her own affairs in attempting to console this deeper grief. "The sun will shine again. Very soon now, anata, the morning will be here."

Hana raised herself to look into the glowing child-face with the soft blue eyes, into which something of a woman's sympathy had crept.

"You mean——" she faltered.

Miyo nodded emphatically.

"Yes, yes. He is coming to Tokyo to-day, and I made Makei telegraph to him to come here."

"To this tea-house? No, *no!*"

"Yes, yes, yes. It is time Captain Fujiwara was told what you did for him. He thinks *I* paid his debt, and he has sent me the money!"

Hana caught the other's hands in her own.

"Promise me," she whispered, "as you promised before, that you will never tell him."

Miyo pouted. "He *ought* to be told. He would wish to know. Does he not love you?"

"He loved Hana San, the temple maid. Perhaps he has already been to find her—as he vowed he would—just to see if she still remembered. But he will say she has forgotten. Hana San will have gone. The singing-bird flown for ever away."

"But he will find you again. And of course he will love you more than ever when he hears the story of your sacrifice. Oh, Hana! you *must* tell him."

"Captain Fujiwara is high-born and great. I am—a geisha."

Miyo shook her head vigorously. Of old she had learnt how impossible it was to argue with Hana when her mind was made up; her clever little brain must devise some other means of bringing the lovers together again. In the meantime her own concerns needed immediate attention.

"If I were half as good as you I wouldn't condescend to marry an Emperor," she declared. "But do you know why I've come to Tokyo, Hana? I'm to be married."

She heaved a profound sigh, looking at her companion from under drooping lashes. But Hana smiled.

"I'm *so* glad," she declared. "The honourable Lieutenant Makei will make a good husband, and I am sure he is very fond of you."

Miyo laughed—and blushed a little too.

"Oh, that isn't It!" she replied with just a shade of embarrassment. "It's Colonel Yamaki."

There was silence for a minute. Hana's face was turned aside.

"Miyo," she said presently, "did you say Colonel Yamaki?"

"Yes. A Mi-ai is arranged for to-morrow. As I hate him before I see him, I'm quite sure to hate him a great deal worse afterwards."

Miyo spoke in the most cheerful of tones.

Poor Hana looked shocked. "You mustn't marry him," she urged. "You must not, indeed. I should miserably fear for your happiness, anata, if you did such a thing."

Miyo yawned—the afternoon was horribly sultry, and she was tired.

"It isn't my idea," she said almost crossly. "It's my father's."

"And your illustrious father commands it?"

There was a great pity in Hana's clear young voice. Was this poor child's fate, then, really irrevocable?

Plainly Miyo did not think so, for she began to laugh.

"Hana," she said, with her most woman-of-the-world manner, "you are *very* young, but you

are dreadfully old-fashioned. When *I* have *seen* Colonel Yamaki, my illustrious parent will learn from *me* what his illustrious commands are to be."

Hana shook her head. "Are you ever serious, child? But tell me again—this Colonel Yamaki, he is a bad man, and yet——"

"All Tokyo says he is a very brave one, but I am sure Makei does not think so—and I am certain that Makei himself is a hundred times braver."

Hana smiled. "I think so, too," she said softly, and waited for the confidences which she knew were ready to follow.

And, whilst Miyo and Hana sat together telling each other, oh! so much that no one else must ever, *ever* know—Makei had been pacing to and fro in the tea-house gardens. He was quite sure that he must wait till naughty little Miyo San chose to reappear again. In the meantime he was quite content, knowing she was with Hana. There never had been so much as a breath of scandal to touch the honour of O Hana San's fair name, head geisha of Mitsu's troupe though she might be.

"Makei!"

A friendly hand was laid on Makei's shoulder, and turning he saw Lieutenant Ito beside him. These two had been sworn comrades since the day they had entered the army together; and Makei, well pleased at an opportune meeting, forgot for the moment to fume and chafe against the miserable shortcomings of his pretty little cousin's education.

"Konnichi-wa," quoth Ito in smiling greeting. "Do you see who is approaching the tea-house?"

Makei looked and frowned.

It was Tanaka, returning probably for more saké and gossip after an idle flirtation with pretty Umé by the lake-side.

"Tanaka," said Ito beneath his breath. "As you know, he is now the editor of the *Tokyo Review*."

Makei's frown became a scowl—he was evidently working himself up into one of his rages.

"Yes, yes," he spluttered volubly. "He is one of Yamaki's cubs. A good opportunity for telling him a bit of my mind."

Ito laughed, patting the irate little man's shoulder.

"Keep cool, Makei, keep cool," he said.

Tanaka lounged up, saluting them with offensive familiarity. "Hello," he yawned. "Come to see the great Hana? Phew! it is most miserably hot out here."

He fanned himself languidly as he spoke.

Makei was tapping the ground with his boot whilst his hands worked convulsively. In truth his honourable toe itched to kick this miserable journalist into the placid lake near by.

"No, we haven't," he almost shouted in reply.

Ito thrust himself forward. "Since you must know," he said disdainfully, "we've come here to meet Captain Fujiwara."

If he had expected Tanaka to be disconcerted by this momentous announcement he was doomed to disappointment. Tanaka continued to fan himself in the calmest fashion.

"Oh," he replied. "He's coming home, is he?"

"Yes," struck in Makei, unable to restrain his

indignation. "He is going to expose a few liars in the Court of Inquiry."

Tanaka regarded the wrathful hero as one might regard a comic actor at the theatre. He seemed intensely amused at this explanation.

"We are going to prove," went on Makei, waxing hotter and hotter, "that it was Fujiwara who took the fort for whose capture Yamaki was promoted."

Tanaka became mildly interested. "Ah, that will be very clever," he said. "Of course you will explain how Fujiwara contrived to do this while a prisoner in the hands of the Russians and badly wounded."

"When Fujiwara fell the fight was won," replied Ito briefly.

"And Yamaki got one of the guides to help him back to his quarters as soon as the fight started," cried Makei, hurling his bomb with defiance.

"On the pretext of a scratch on the leg," murmured Ito.

"Then came back when it was all over," shouted Makei, tiptoeing in his excitement.

"Resumed command," supplemented Ito.

"And wrote that lying dispatch that you published," screamed Makei, shaking his fist in a fury, "taking all the credit—the despicable, dishonourable hound—and accusing Fujiwara of disobedience."

Tanaka closed his fan and his eyes with an expression of weariness.

"My dear little fellow," he murmured, "why get angry with *me?* I only printed the official reports."

"I'm not angry," retorted Makei, who by this

time was verging on an apoplexy. "I'm mildly and gently telling you that all your confounded stories are villainous lies."

"Then why," asked Tanaka sweetly, "haven't they been contradicted by the men who were there?"

"It was pitch dark," explained Makei.

"There was a panic," added Ito.

"And general confusion," gabbled Makei. "The men, in fact, were too busy fighting to notice Yamaki's absence."

Tanaka raised his eyebrows.

"That is unfortunate," he observed. "What about the man who helped Yamaki to his quarters?"

There was subtle irony in the question. The young officers looked at each other.

"He was captured by Chinese brigands the next day," sighed Makei.

"Poor Suki," added Ito. "He was killed soon enough by the villains."

"Still more unfortunate," said Tanaka, beginning to fan himself again. "Suki is dead—and the story rests on Suki."

Makei scowled. He had seen Colonel Yamaki enter the garden with friends.

"Yet some people seem afraid of it," he retorted significantly.

"Hence all the slanders about Fujiwara ever since he was found to be alive," quoth Ito, who had also noted the approach of Yamaki, and now laid his hand on Makei's arm, trying to draw him away.

"We are going to trace those lies to their source," cried Makei, nodding his head very vigorously. He had *quite* forgotten his solicitude after little Miyo

San's well-being by this time. "We *shall* know it too, when we have found the proprietor of your miserably lying paper."

"And I," muttered Ito *sotto voce*, "believe the first letter of his name is 'Y.' Come, Makei, it is time for *honourable* gentlemen to be leaving the tea-house for the present."

And Makei suffered himself to be dragged off with the lingering regret of a hungry dog who leaves a particularly luscious bone behind him.

CHAPTER XII

THE OBEDIENCE OF A GEISHA

Colonel Yamaki strolled forward, looking idly round. It certainly was quite a pleasant place in which to spend a spare hour or two entertaining his guests, this new tea-house whose fame had so easily been established.

A cluster of dainty little tea-house girls were awaiting his august commands, already his guests had seated themselves.

"Let Hana be sent for," Yamaki said carelessly to one of the waiting girls. Then he strode up to Tanaka, who had not followed Makei and Ito from the tea-house.

"I heard my name as I came in just now," he observed. "What was that young coxcomb saying?"

Tanaka laughed. "Threatening you with Fujiwara's thunders," he replied—"thunders without lightning."

Yamaki smiled grimly. "I know, I know," he nodded. "But while they prepare their make-believe thunders, I have made sure of a real lightning-conductor. Please announce my impending marriage to the daughter of General Okubo, who is to preside over the Court of Inquiry."

Tanaka bowed. He was immensely impressed at this mark of genius.

"That's a master-stroke, Augustness," he replied. "It shall be announced to-morrow."

"No, no. It must be announced to-night. Remember that. The old fool must be tied to it before he can change his mind."

The last words were muttered in an undertone, whilst the Colonel, turning, came face to face with Mitsu. The mistress of the tea-house was still robed in her flowing yellow robes, but at the present moment her usually serenely smiling face was troubled and anxious.

"I have brought guests to be entertained," said the Colonel coldly. "Where's Hana?"

Mitsu looked round nervously. "Most honourably, permit that one of the others sing," she pleaded. "I am sure Ko-Matsu is not so bad."

She motioned the pretty little geisha forward. Ko-Matsu smiled and fluttered her scarlet sleeves as she held her samisen in readiness.

But Yamaki was obdurate. "I want Hana," he replied abruptly.

"Sumako has the voice of a nightingale," urged Mitsu volubly. "She will be here in a moment. Her dancing is a dream. I am sure your Superiority would be more than satisfied."

Yamaki began to grow angry, and before his anger poor Mitsu trembled.

Fortunately a voice from the threshold of the tea-house checked what had seemed likely to grow to an altercation.

"You sent for me?" questioned Hana quietly.

Yamaki looked up, and a gleam of triumph shone in his cruel eyes.

He was quite aware of the little romance which lay between a hated rival and the Temple maid. Also he could guess with shrewd accuracy what the miracle had been which transferred a holy miko into a geisha girl. And, being petty of purpose and mean of soul, he rejoiced to think how he could further pain the man whose career he was doing his best to ruin.

"Yes," he said abruptly; "come here. There's nothing to be afraid of." And he laughed mockingly.

Slowly she crossed the court and stood before him. Slim and graceful in her heavily embroidered kimono, with its soft colourings—so unlike the gaudy hues beloved of geisha-maids.

Neither did she wear jewellery of any kind, only a purple aster which nestled amidst the soft folds of her robe, slipped into the deep obi close to her heart.

"I am not afraid of you," said Hana San very quietly. "I do not like you."

Her small, pure face, unmarred by paint or whitening, was raised steadily to his, her great dark eyes seeming to read into his very soul, in a lofty contempt and disdain.

Yamaki laughed again, but his mirth was forced and unnatural. "I do not ask for love," he sneered; "only a song."

She still steadily regarded him. "Song is praise," she replied without emotion. "It trills gladly from the heart in the sunshine of loving eyes, but it freezes when sympathy is absent."

Yamaki bowed. "Honourably please to remember," he said significantly, "you are a geisha. I

am a client of this house." He paused, delighted to see her wince at the allusion to her slavery. "I abjectly beg for a song," he concluded.

Hana turned, slow tears welling in her dark eyes.

"Mitsu!" she pleaded—for she would not plead to him.

Mitsu, who was by no means bad-hearted, was genuinely distressed. But she dared not gainsay so wealthy and powerful a client as Yamaki.

"What can I do, anata?" she sighed. "It is true that a geisha's business is to smile and obey."

Yamaki's thin lips tightened in a smile of cruel pleasure. If only Fujiwara were here to see his temple dove in her present plight!

"Now will you graciously favour my guests?" he asked suavely.

"It is a geisha's business to smile and obey," replied Hana automatically, and went, with bowed head, in search of her samisen, heedless of the jealous glances cast at her by the rejected geishas who tittered and whispered behind their fans—mocking her.

She might have understood their mocks—but not their jealousy. Was it possible they could really envy Hana San—the unhappiest little geisha in Tokyo?

But Colonel Yamaki, sipping his saké and smoking at ease amongst his guests, watched through half-veiled lids the girl, who, samisen in hand, knelt down on her mat and began to sing.

A sad little song, to a quaint, haunting melody, both in vivid contrast to the gay geisha tunes and merry, laughing singers. The last verse specially

rang with wild appeal, thrilling upwards in sweet, clear notes which stirred all hearts—

"Sad the melody that now I make
To my samisen,
Hopes are shattered as the strings that break
On a samisen;
Here like a captive bird am I,
Freedom and love—for these I sigh!
Often the tears will flow
As I bend low
O'er my samisen.
Oh my love! if you knew
How my heart longs for you!
Ne'er was maiden's heart so true
Ever since the world began.
Far away though you be,
Over land, over sea;
Come, my beloved, come to me,
To your O Hana San." [1]

A thridding of strings—the long, lingering echo of a sweet young voice—then silence. Even the gay little geisha, whose hearts were so readily opened by a golden key, felt their pulses quicken and eyes burn in a moment of emotion.

Yamaki was probably the only one there to whom the song had presented itself in the light of an amusing episode which would probably have a yet more amusing sequel.

He even began to hope Fujiwara would come to Tokyo. If so they must certainly visit the Garden of Sweet Content together.

Her song over, Hana Sana made her escape. She had done her duty—and, whatever more might be expected of her, physical endurance refused to give it. She must escape back to her room—to find solace for her grief and shame in the comforting arms of Miyo San.

[1] By permission of Messrs. Chappell & Co., Ltd.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RETURN OF SUKI

Mitsu gave a sigh of relief as she plumped herself rather heavily down on her mat beside her loving but undemonstrative bridegroom.

Hashimoto, indeed, had stolen in to the deserted tea-house garden to have a quiet smoke and read all by himself. He had been busily unfolding his copy of the *Tokyo Review,* when Mitsu appeared—so suddenly that there was no possibility of escape.

Evidently Hashimoto's nerves had been thoroughly upset by the *san-san-do*. Or did that vast expanse of yellow silk robes tend to overpower him?

"I'm glad that Colonel has gone," said Mitsu, fanning herself vigorously. "He's a nice man, but I don't wonder the Russians ran away from him. If only my Suki——"

She paused, sighing, and fanning away still more energetically.

Hashimoto laid down his paper and turned gingerly round on his mat. He was miserably afraid Mitsu was going to make love again, so he seized on Suki's name as one might seize on a leafy branch to keep off troublesome flies.

"What about Suki?" he asked.

"I didn't say anything," replied Mitsu, beginning to sniff.

Hashimoto edged away. "No, but you made a difficult face," he protested.

The sniffing grew louder—much louder.

"Well, Suki was the kindest, bravest, best and truest angel of goodness that ever breathed," she sobbed.

Hashimoto mopped a perspiring brow. He began to feel more cheerful, since Mitsu was apparently far from any desire to make love to him.

"When I think of all he's done for me," he said thoughtfully, "I feel as if I should never tire of his horrible death. Here, read it to me again, Mitsu. I've got it here."

He spread the *Tokyo Review* carefully out upon the ground.

If Mitsu were reading she certainly could not make love. But Mitsu did not seem at all anxious to read, for she hugged herself closely, rocking to and fro as though in physical pain.

"I can't," she moaned. "Oh, I can't!"

But Hashimoto was firm—he was beginning to realize that after all there had been something in the drinking of those three little cups of saké. Mitsu was now a woman who had to obey her husband.

"Yes," he said commandingly, "go on. It's a horrible tale, and it always cheers me up. That's why I always carry it about with me."

And he folded his lean arms impressively.

Mitsu, still sniffing and protesting, picked up the paper. This was terrible!—and yet, when Hashimoto spoke in that firm voice he had better perhaps be obeyed.

"Sensational death," she began, gulping down a

sob, "of the modest Suki, the humble hero of Japan. Taken prisoner by Chinese pirates. Horrible agonies——" Her voice rose to a scream, and she flung down the paper.

Up from the lake-side, slipping softly through the closely growing shrubs, glided a figure, at sight of which one of the tea-house girls who was lingering near, in case of the approach of any clients, gave a low scream of terror. It was such a curious figure, with a big fur-edged cap pulled low over its brow.

But, to the girl's surprise, her lips, just opening for a second and louder scream, were sealed by the pressure of other lips, whilst a voice—quite an ordinary voice talking in her own native tongue—whispered consolingly in her ear.

The tea-house girl backed, tittering, to where a group of geisha stood chattering and yawning, flirting their fans and tapping now and then on their little drums as if inviting customers to enter and view their charming entertainment.

The geisha had not seen the strange figure with the fur-edged cap yet—they were laughing now at something that absurd Tanaka had said.

Tanaka was always in great favour with the geisha girls, and he was promising that he should be having a great deal to say about them all one day in the *Tokyo Review,* when, turning, he too happened to catch a glimpse of the face which shone white and drawn under a fur-edged cap.

And Tanaka had nothing more to say to the laughing little flock of geisha girls, but suddenly remembered he had a very important appointment

to keep elsewhere in Tokyo that sultry afternoon.

It was the sultriness of the weather that naturally made him wipe his perspiring brow more than once as he hurried away.

Mitsu was still reading aloud. Something was the matter with her voice to-day, for at times it rose to a high crescendo note and again dropped into a husky sob.

"'As he faced—as he faced the Chinese pirates who had taken him captive, the hum—humble hero was a terrible figure. His—his eyes ("O Hashi, and his eyes were so miserably beautiful")—flashed tender—I mean deadly—fire, and the hoarse, deep roar of his martial rage poured unceasing from his throat—("He always was one to talk, poor dearly lamented Suki!") as the Chinese barbarians cut off his arms and then——'"

There was a series of little flute-like screams from the geisha, who suddenly rose from their mats like a flock of startled pigeons and went fluttering off in the wake of Tanaka.

They, too, had seen the mysterious figure which came gliding in from the shrubbery without—they too had seen a white face under a fur-edged cap.

"Hullo!" said Hashimoto, disturbed in his delightful reverie of the unfortunate Suki's horrible sufferings. "What——"

The word froze on his lips as he looked round.

Mitsu read on slowly in varying cadences; but Hashimoto was crawling away as fast as he could towards the shelter of the shoji.

Mitsu came to a stop in the midst of a blood-curdling description of Suki's final end.

"Why!" she said, looking in surprise at the empty mat beside her. "If——" Then suddenly she fell forward on her face with a scream.

"Why," exclaimed Suki in surprise, as he pulled off his unusual headgear, "it's Mitsu!"

"Forgive me," howled Mitsu, in a panic. "Forgive me this time. I'll never do it again. Never, never, never!"

Suki looked amazed. "What has she been up to?" he thought to himself, as he glanced curiously round the luxurious tea-house. "This is where *I'm* going to learn a bit!"

Mitsu's shrill wails grew louder and louder.

"Please, honourable Mr. Ghost," she sobbed, "*don't* haunt me!"

Suki's smile was illuminating. "Haunt?" he echoed meditatively; then, kneeling down beside her: "What have you done?" he demanded in hollow tones. "*I know all.* But tell me again."

Mitsu's fat sides were shaking in terror and woe.

"It's all quite true," she moaned.

"What's all quite true?"

"All that you know."

Suki could not restrain a chuckle.

"Now, you saucy tea-leaf, what have you been up to?" he demanded with marital playfulness.

Mitsu bounced up, her whole expression changing at sight of his laughing face.

"Why—I——" she stammered. "You—you're *alive!*"

"Of course," agreed Suki amiably. "I've always been alive ever since I was born."

Mitsu was still gasping. "But the *Tokyo Review* had a lovely account of your horrible death," she cried.

"Yes," nodded Suki, "I wrote it."

"*You* wrote it?"

"Of course. When Yamaki tried to get me killed by Chinese pirates I imagined what my sufferings would be like, and——"

"Then you weren't killed?"

"No—as you see, I am honourably alive. The pirates turned out to be old friends of mine, and so instead of sudden death we tossed two out of three——"

Mitsu was recovering herself.

"That's so like you," she scolded, kneeling up on her mat. "First you are dead, and then you are not! You're so unreliable. A woman never knows where to have you."

Suki wagged his head sorrowfully.

"It seems to me, Mitsu," he said, "that the place where you would like to have me is the warrior's tomb."

"Mitsu!"

Mitsu looked up and gave a start.

Hashimoto, followed by the whole geisha troupe, was tiptoeing back.

"Mitsu," whispered Hashimoto again, "is it a *ghost?*"

Mitsu wrung her hands. If these two—husbands—met, what would be the consequences?

"Suki," she murmured despairingly, "you had better go quickly! I—I'll explain *everything* after."

But Suki was not to be so easily hoodwinked as Hashimoto, and was, moreover, of an exceedingly curious disposition, so he lolled back on his heels, watching the stealthy approach of his successor with much amusement.

"Why, there's old Hashimoto, too!" he exclaimed aloud. "I want to talk to him. Hashimoto!"

Hashimoto leapt into the air in his terror, and came down to Mother Earth on his knees. Squatting there he returned Suki's stare with interest.

"What?" he gasped. "You're not a ghost?"

Suki laughed boisterously. "Ghost!" he scoffed. "You never saw a ghost drink wine as I will if you'll bring me some."

There came a simultaneous shriek of delight from the geisha, who came flocking forward full of questions and congratulations.

Hashimoto was too confused yet to say anything. He always imbibed startling information slowly.

"Quick," said Mitsu nervously, "bring him saké."

The geisha ran off, laughing and chattering; they were already beginning to guess why it was Mitsu looked so agitated.

"Go on, Mitsu," said Hashimoto imperiously, "bring him wine."

Mitsu hesitated. If these two husbands were left together they might start explaining things to each other—and that would never do.

Men are so thick-headed where a fine young

woman—and a prosperous tea-house—are concerned.

"I want to hear his adventures," she whined.

Suki smiled dubiously. "There won't be any till I've had something to whet my imagination," he explained.

"But I *want* to listen," urged Mitsu.

"But he wants to drink," argued Hashimoto.

"But——"

"Not a word, Mitsu," struck in Suki firmly. "Wine! *Wine!*"

Mitsu gave it up. "Oh, you idiot!" she stormed, and flounced into the tea-house in a frenzy of apprehension.

Suki stroked his chin reflectively. "Now that is like home," he murmured.

Hashimoto had been too busy propounding a problem to attend to the little piece of by-play that was going on.

But as soon as Mitsu's yellow robes had vanished from sight he turned eagerly to Suki.

"Suki," he said solemnly, "you could always read my fortune. Do you see any difference in me? What do you think of my face?"

He set it in an inane grin, raising it to the critical stare of the adventurous fortune-teller.

Suki looked grave.

"I don't like to tell you on an empty stomach," he said. "What's happened?"

"You'll never guess," said Hashimoto. "I'm so excited."

His usually yellow face was quite red with the strength of mingled emotions.

"Have you swallowed a chopstick by any chance?" demanded Suki cautiously.

Hashimoto shook his head. "No," he said.

"Well—er—well——?"

"I'm—I'm married."

"*Married!*" Suki's surprise was quite genuine this time. "Why, who's been marrying you?"

Hashimoto closed his eyes. "You remember the plentiful mousmé at Tsumura?"—he spread out his arms as though encompassing an imaginary Mitsu.

"What!" gasped Suki. "Yes! Did you get the money?"

Hashimoto chuckled gleefully. "You don't suppose a man with brains like mine would have married the lovesick old duck for her looks?" he asked, patting his chest in great self-satisfaction. "This is *my* tea-house."

Suki stretched out his hand.

"My dear friend!" he exclaimed, "we must be better acquainted! You're handsome! Yes, yes. *Very* handsome. But I can't think how you did it."

"Honourably speaking, it was the letter you wrote for me."

"Letter? Letter? Oh! '*I sighed and gasped.*' Ha, ha, of course. I always thought the gasping would do it."

"Yes," groaned Hashimoto, lapsing into depression again, "it has done for me."

"What's her name?" asked Suki, leaning forward.

It was at this moment that Mitsu entered,

followed by two little tea-house girls bringing wine and saké.

Mitsu's ears were sharp and her measures taken with the promptitude befitting a General on campaign—or a mistress of geisha.

"Suki!" she cried shrilly, "if you don't want that girl to spili the wine you'd better take it."

Suki was on his feet in a twinkling. There was only *one* way that wine might be permissibly spilt —and that was down his dry and dusty throat.

The afternoon was *very* sultry. He was beginning to appreciate the Garden of Sweet Content more and more as he chucked the pretty little mousmé who held the lacquer tray for him under the chin.

Mitsu had taken advantage of successful strategy to pull Hashimoto on one side.

"Don't tell him I'm your wife," she whispered.

Hashimoto stared—she had interrupted him in the midst of one problem by propounding another.

"Why?" he asked.

"Oh—I don't know! I'm shy before company. Remember!"

Hashimoto tried to remember his position and be self-assertive.

"Perhaps you are right," he replied. "It is not an affair for august pride."

For once Mitsu did not attempt argument.

"Now then," called Suki, filling his glass again, "come and drink wine with me, you two. Ha! ha! Who'd have thought it!"

"Thought what?" asked Mitsu, with concern.

"Why, Hashimoto getting married! Excellent!

My most humble congratulations to you and the honourable bride, my friend."

Mitsu turned pale. "Has—has he told you?" she questioned.

"Yes, of course. That's why I'm drinking his health and her health. By the way, what did you say her name was, Hashi?"

Hashimoto opened his mouth—but Mitsu quickly laid her hand across it.

"Don't tell him," she commanded.

Suki laughed. He was feeling *very* happy just now. Certainly Tokyo was just the place for him; and he and Mitsu were going to make money after all over that old fool Hashimoto and his ridiculous old bride.

"Ha! ha!" he chortled. "It doesn't matter about her name- he's got the money."

"*The money?*" echoed Mitsu, glaring round at Hashimoto, who, after many vain attempts to stop Suki's unfortunate revelations, was looking vainly round for escape.

"Yes," said Suki, quite innocently, "he's a sly old fox, is Hashi—yes, you are—you know you are, Hashi, so don't be bashful. No money—no marriage, eh?"

"I don't believe it," said Mitsu; but she was looking unutterable things at Hashimoto as she spoke.

"Why!" cried Suki, draining his glass, "he's just told me as much, eh, Hashi? You said you'd married the lovesick old duck for her money, didn't you?"

Mitsu turned green with suppressed fury.

"Lovesick—old —" she gurgled. Then, advancing towards the retreating Hashimoto, "How *dare* you say such a thing," she gasped.

"Ha! ha!" chuckled the oblivious Suki. "And you used to say no woman but an idiot would ever marry Hashi."

Hashimoto had forgotten problems—here was plain fact. The insolence of it appalled him.

"Mitsu," he said severely, "you said that?"

"Yes, of course," replied Suki, slipping his arm round Mitsu's plump waist. "She said you'd be the most henpecked husband in Japan."

Hashimoto stared over his spectacles at this obtrusively spoken fortune-teller.

"You are getting too familiar," he said loftily. "Come away, Mitsu."

Suki flushed angrily. "What do you mean by giving orders to my——" he began, but Hashimoto interrupted him.

"What do you mean by making so free with my——"

"Let me tell you," bawled Suki, "that Mitsu is a married woman!"

Hashimoto looked at Mitsu in surprise.

"Why, he knows," he murmured.

Mitsu was at her wits' end. Here, indeed, must come the time for explanations.

"Yes, yes," she entreated wildly. "I'll explain everything presently. But one at a time, gentlemen, one at a time. Hashi, dear, let me miserably implore you to get some more saké—while——" she tiptoed to whisper in his ear—"I'll break it to him gently," she added, "whilst you're gone."

Hashimoto nodded. "Very well," he said resignedly. "Though I haven't the least idea why *I* should get the saké when *my* servants ought to be waiting on me, let alone my own wife."

He went, grumbling and reluctant—yet obedient—towards the tea-house.

CHAPTER XIV

A CASE OF BIGAMY

SUKI folded his arms with the air of a judge.

"Mitsu," he said sternly, "what's the meaning of all this? Are you engaged here?"

Mitsu hung her head.

"Well, not exactly engaged," she confessed. "You see, Hashimoto's married."

"Yes, yes. Of course. It was I who wrote the letter that shook the old cherry-blossom off the branch."

Mitsu's hands fell to her side. "*You!*" she screamed. "*You* who wrote that beautiful line about the slenderness of my waist?"

"*Your* waist?" Suki's jaw dropped in open-mouthed amazement. "You mean to say——" He came slowly towards her. Already he understood. "You mean to say——" he began.

Mitsu nodded vigorously and began to sob. "Yes, yes, yes."

"You dare to tell me!"

"Yes. I'm—I'm the woman who has m-married him."

"What!" cried Suki, in a voice of thunder. "You stand there like a thing of life, with all the outward seeming of maidenly innocence, and deliberately tell me that you've committed BIGAMY?"

"Yes, I've 'big'd,' and it's all your own fault," sobbed Mitsu, hiding her face in her hands. "If you will go shedding your beautiful poetry for other people's love-making, and then pretend to be beautifully dead, you can't blame others. If—*if* there was only one drop of water in the world, you'd manage to miserably drown in it."

"When were you married?"

"An hour ago."

"Ah! But why marry *him?*"

"I—I cried so much over the beautiful account of your lovely death that I had to find a bit of comfort somewhere."

"You don't call Hashimoto a 'bit of comfort'? —And the baby? Don't tell me you have given him my baby."

"N-no. I haven't told him yet. I've sent for it."

"Going to give him my baby, the heir to all my prospects? And what's become of that mousmé Hana I got you at Tsumura?"

Mitsu began to dry her eyes.

"She's the most popular geisha in Japan. She's made us heaps of money."

Suki brightened visibly. "Ah, that's better. Where is it?"

Mitsu was silent.

"*Where is it?*" asked Suki impatiently.

Mitsu began to tremble. "I've—I've given it to him!"

"You've given Hashimoto my hard-earned savings." Suki could hardly believe his own ears.

"Yes," said Mitsu desperately, resolved to make

a clean breast of everything, "I gave him the tea-house and her indentures this morning for a wedding present."

"You did? You miserably foolish creature! You dare stand there and tell me that? This tea-house! Lord of hell! I'll kill him. I'll throttle him as he stands. Where is he?"

"He's coming," said Mitsu promptly. "And if you say you are my husband he'll stick to the lot."

There was sufficient common sense in this last remark to appeal forcibly to Suki.

With difficulty he controlled his outraged feelings and began to rack his nimble brains for a scheme wherewith to outwit an unlooked-for rival.

Hashimoto came trotting back, rubbing his hands gleefully, his simple face irradiated with smiles.

"Has she told you all about it?" he asked Suki.

Suki glared at Mitsu, then saluted Hashimoto with a profound bow.

"Oh yes," he said, "she has told me all about it."

Hashimoto nodded. "Mitsu, Mitsu," he called, as though addressing a kitten, "come here! She's an affectionate little thing, Suki—she says I'm her first love."

Suki twirled round on his toes and executed an impromptu sword-dance. It was the only way of relieving his feelings—and it really did do him good. The sultriness of the afternoon helped, too, to soothe that first unquenchable ardour to commit murder upon Hashimoto.

The latter had seated himself comfortably on his mat.

"Now you've had enough to eat and drink, what about my fortune?" he asked.

Suki dropped down on the mat beside him, and Mitsu crawled as unobtrusively as her copious yellow robes would permit to a place close to Suki's side.

"I'm afraid," said Suki, speaking in a tense whisper as he glowered upon his innocent victim, "you are going to be unlucky. As soon as I came in, if you remember, I said your face looked funny. It made me think of an earthquake."

Hashimoto began to shiver. "Is it as bad as that?" he faltered.

"It's worse," said Suki hoarsely. "It's too horrible to describe. I—I can't bear to look at it!"

Hashimoto was becoming more and more agitated. Even Mitsu began edging herself a little nearer to him and a little farther from the vindictive Suki.

"But have I done anything unlucky?" groaned Hashimoto nervously.

Suki tapped his forehead, then took Hashimoto's hand in his and began to peruse the lines through a magnifying-glass.

"Have you done anything unlucky?" he questioned. "Ah! Haven't you taken the indentures of a mousmé who was dedicated to the service of the gods? An awful disaster threatens the man who owns her. I see the Earth-dragon wagging his tail, I see the hills dancing in the air, the fiery mountains hurled headlong on your writhing body. I hear you shriek and groan in ghastly pangs and agonies. I see you writhing in——"

"Stop!" cried the panic-stricken Hashimoto,

who appeared to be on the verge of fainting; "you—you've seen quite enough. What am I to do?"

"Get rid of the girl," urged Suki, with intense earnestness. "Give her away. Beg your best friend to take her off your hands. Anything to escape the vengeance of the gods."

Tears streamed down Hashimoto's face. "You—you're really the best friend I've got," he sobbed helplessly.

Suki drew in a deep breath. "You want me, then," said he, "to bring this most terrible and lamentable disaster on to my own head?"

"Perhaps," suggested Hashimoto feebly, "the gods would not be so angry with you because you are so kind-hearted."

A broad smile had been slowly dawning over Mitsu's expansive face.

By the time this climax was reached she was ready to act her part.

Clasping her fat hands, she bent forward as though in entreaty towards Suki.

"Yes, you are so lamentably kind-hearted, Suki," she implored. "Save him."

"No," said Suki very firmly, "I could not think of it."

"Yes, yes, Suki," begged Mitsu. "Take her. What is a bit of suffering to one so honourably brave, so long as you save my husband?"

Suki sighed. It appeared that the appeal to the heroic side of his nature had not been in vain.

"All right," he said at last, after a long pause, during which Hashimoto and Mitsu seemed to regard him as though their very lives hung in the

balance. "I will take Hana's indentures—for the sake of your husband."

There was something so inspiringly noble in his self-sacrifice that Mitsu wept aloud.

"Saved! saved!" she sobbed, falling into Hashimoto's arms. "My husband!"

Hashimoto staggered under the weight of his obligations.

But, as soon as he had recovered his breath, he quickly scrambled to his feet. It would be quite time enough to thank the disinterested Suki when the threatened vengeance of the gods was safely averted.

"Come along, Mitsu," he said, catching her hand. "Let's get him the indentures before he changes his mind."

It was Mitsu who, looking back from the tea-house entrance, saw the heroic Suki seated on a mat, his head bent over his knees, which were drawn up and encircled by a pair of lean brown arms. Suki's sides were violently convulsed with emotion.

No doubt it was dread at the thought of the unheard-of misfortunes which the possession of O Hana San seemed likely to bring upon him which caused such agitation.

And Mitsu smiled in sympathy.

CHAPTER XV

MIYO SAN MASQUERADES

MAKEI had come back, hot and breathless, having suddenly remembered his resolution to see disobedient Miyo San safely home.

He entered the tea-house garden in such haste that he very nearly knocked over a solitary little geisha girl who had just stepped out from behind the shoji.

He stopped to apologize and remained to gasp. Miyo San kowtowed low, rubbing her knees respectfully. Then she began to laugh and dance slowly round the petrified Makei, who stood quite still regarding her with stern disapproval.

And yet Miyo had never looked so dainty, so charming, so altogether desirable as she did in the gorgeous butterfly raiment to which she had no right at all.

"What are you doing in that geisha dress?" demanded Makei severely. "I tell you Yamaki will be here directly. We had better go at once."

During his walk with Ito, Makei had chanced to hear about the proposed mi-ai between Colonel Yamaki and his little cousin. The news had filled the young Samurai with pain and unhappiness.

But perhaps it made him more gentle in his

rebuke of a naughty little mousmé who did not at all understand the approaching crisis in her life.

Miyo San was in the gayest of humours, delighted with the effect of her "dressing up." She knew she made the most charming geisha girl imaginable, and she also knew that her Cousin Makei was well aware of the fact. So she only flirted her fan, and struck her tiny "drum of office," with the most mischievous grimace for a would-be outraged lover.

"Why?" she asked. "If the place is good enough for my future husband, it's good enough for me!"

Makei shook his head. "Men are different," he said. "Men can go anywhere. Hark! I hear Yamaki's voice. Come away."

But Miyo drew back, pouting rebelliously.

"Yes, *you* run away," she retorted. "I am most particularly anxious to talk to him."

"Do not be so foolish, Miyo. It is impossible that Yamaki should see you here."

He put out his hand, making a grab at a butterfly sleeve. But Miyo was as elusive as a kitten. With a bound she had reached a shadowed corner, hiding herself behind the tasselled festoons of wistaria, through which her bright little face peeped out, wreathed in mocking smiles.

"Go away," she whispered, as footsteps were heard approaching. "Don't argue, but go away, *at once*. You may come back for me later. Now go or—or I'll marry the honourable Colonel to-morrow."

And Miyo San was—or boasted herself to be—a woman of her word.

Makei retired, crestfallen, anxious, and perplexed.

It was a lamentably false position for a well-born mousmé to place herself in, though of course a child like Miyo did not understand. Nevertheless, the child Miyo had to be obeyed, so Makei turned away with a heavy heart, and went off down to the lake-side, wondering when Fujiwara would be here, and trusting nothing would delay him from being in time for that all-important Court of Inquiry.

In thinking of his friend he once more forgot—or partly forgot—Miyo San, who had slipped out from behind the hanging festoons of wistaria, yet hung back for a moment as she noted that Colonel Yamaki was not alone.

A tall young man in a plain blue kimono was with him, to whom Yamaki was addressing himself impressively.

"Please understand," Miyo heard him say, "understand particularly that on no account must my proprietorship of the *Review* be known."

Tanaka, the editor, bowed. "Your honourable order shall be obeyed," he replied gravely, and hurried away, no doubt very pleased to escape from an unpleasant interview.

Meantime, Miyo advanced smilingly. She had hated Colonel Yamaki long before she saw him, now she did see him she hated him a great deal more than she had imagined to be possible. His long, narrow face, with its mean jaw, cruel mouth, and the shifting treachery of his eyes all and each told its tale to Miyo; but she smiled all the

same, for she had her purpose in choosing this interview.

Yamaki stopped short at sight of the dainty little butterfly figure in its blue-and-silver draperies, surveying it with a stare which somehow brought a burning blush of shame to Miyo's pretty cheeks and a very real anger to her blue eyes. So she drooped her lashes and tried hard to go on smiling.

"Ah!" said Yamaki slowly. "Who are you? A new geisha?"

Miyo looked up and nodded with a sprightly air. She *would* act her part, cost what it might. And she was thinking all the time of Makei—dear, kind, brave little Makei.

"My first day here," she said gaily.

"H'm!" said Yamaki absently. "Run and tell Hana that I want her."

Miyo stood immovable. "Honourably excuse," she murmured. "Your Excellency has been to the war: *you* can run so much faster."

Yamaki frowned angrily. "Why!" he cried. "You dare to——"

Miyo clapped her hands saucily. "Aha!" she cried. "I thought I'd make you notice me."

"Oh, that's it," said he, and looked again at the dainty but impudent little geisha with kindling interest. "Well, you are rather pretty."

Miyo bowed respectfully. "Your Excellency has good taste," she replied. "I wish—yes, I most lamentably wish—I could return the compliment!"

"What?" demanded Yamaki, half angry still.

Miyo came a few steps nearer, dancing forward on her gay little feet. "I should be deceiving you

if I said *you* were pretty," she said. "Still, you are *interesting*."

Yamaki laughed, yielding to undeniable charm, and a *naïveté* which was refreshing.

"Come," he said, "there's something attractive in your impudence. I think I shall like you."

He made as though to slip his arm round her waist. But she eluded him without difficulty, and from a safe distance bowed with exasperating demureness.

"Honourably excuse," she murmured; "kindly reserve these august privileges for your wife."

"Ah!" observed Yamaki, surveying her with amusement. "Little cats have sharp ears. What have you heard?"

Miyo put on an air of profound intelligence.

"The daughter of the illustrious General Okubo, is it not?" she queried.

"Bah!" replied Yamaki impatiently; "a precocious child who thinks she's a woman of the world."

Miyo tilted her chin aggressively. "Oh, *does* she?" she echoed.

"And imagines every man is in love with her!"

A fair little head was tossed scornfully back.

"Then I'm sure *you* won't marry her," said the brand-new little geisha girl,—and if her voice trembled Yamaki was very far indeed from guessing the source of her emotion.

In fact he began to flatter himself that this pretty butterfly creature was taking quite a personal interest in his matrimonial affairs, and being essentially

a vain man he allowed himself to expand into unwary confidences.

"Oh, don't you mind, little one!" he said gaily. "One laughs at these trifles. Her father's influence will be useful—that's *her* only attraction. But I'd lose her any day to find you."

Miyo retreated towards the wistaria-covered balcony. "Perhaps you will find me again—and then lose her," she retorted. "And Hana too."

"Hana!" Yamaki laughed under his breath. "Aha! you are jealous."

"Oh, *dear*, no. But won't you look miserably foolish when Captain Fujiwara snatches the prize you've tried so hard to gain."

"Fujiwara!"

Yamaki looked startled as he echoed the name of the man he hated so bitterly and so unjustly. Miyo bowed with elaborate politeness; but inwardly she was raging with fury against this upstart schemer who dared so openly announce his intentions towards her.

"Perhaps you don't know," she continued rapidly, "that he is expected here to-day! Hana is waiting for him now. When Captain Fujiwara comes he will buy her indentures, then he will marry her, and they will be happy ever after, while poor Colonel Yamaki will be gnashing his teeth outside, trying to 'laugh at these little things.'"

Yamaki drew in his breath with a low hissing sound, and for a moment his eyes were very evil.

"Ah, that's the idea, is it?" he murmured. "I wonder where Hashimoto is? This may be useful information."

Miyo laughed, little dreaming what mischief she might be doing whilst enjoying her own revenge for indirect insult.

"Yes," she retorted, "you'd better make haste if you want her!"

"I will," replied Yamaki, regarding her steadily. "You're a little viper. But—afterwards I *must* see you again."

He went towards the tea-house, bent on being his own messenger since this impudent but bewitching child refused the errand, whilst Miyo, backing slowly down the path which led to the terraced gardens, laughed softly to herself.

"I assure your Excellency I am looking forward to that meeting," she murmured. "Oh, I know I'm going to enjoy myself."

She fluttered her wide, butterfly sleeves as she spoke, glancing down with pleased vanity at her slim and gorgeous little person.

Never, never would she pity Hana for being a geisha,—it was the most delightful game imaginable!

Up from the lower terrace of the garden came Makei, creeping softly.

The last half-hour had been an exceedingly unpleasant one for him. He longed to march boldly up to the spot where undoubtedly Miyo in geisha dress was flirting—actually *flirting* with his enemy. But the longing had been restrained, for had not Miyo warned him of the miserably disastrous effects of interference? Yet, though honour prevented him from being an ear-witness of that unconventional "first seeing," he had been—from afar—an

eye-witness. If Yamaki *had* succeeded in slipping his insolently insinuating arm round a slim waist Makei would have been able to control himself no longer, but must have rushed on fate with all the thunder of the gods, seeking vengeance.

But Miyo had shown some lingering remnant of discretion there, so Makei waited till Yamaki disappeared into the tea-house. Then, without more ado, he hastened back to that incomparably bewitching, distracting and exasperating little cousin of his.

"Well?" he demanded breathlessly. "What did he say?"

Miyo leaned back against a slender wooden support round which dainty creepers had been artistically twined. She was still greatly angry with Yamaki; but Makei—well, she thought after a certain amount of teasing she would make him an ally. But she could not help beginning with the teasing.

"Oh, he's desperately in love with me," she replied, fanning herself so vigorously that fair hair was tossed into little ringlets of confusion amongst gay geisha ornaments.

"I suppose," said Makei severely, "you encouraged him?"

A pair of blue eyes alone were visible over the edge of the fan.

"No," said Miyo, sweetly innocent; "but he said I was pretty."

"And what did you say?"

"Of course I complimented him on his good taste."

Makei began to pace to and fro. "Naturally you're flattered," he snarled, "because he told you a lot of lies."

Down went the fan as an irate little mousmé flashed her reply—

"How dare you say it was a lie to call me pretty?"

"*I* never talk to you like that!"

Miyo leaned back against the pole, yawning. "No," she agreed, "you're too young and inexperienced to make love yet to any one."

"Am I?" retorted Makei, nodding his head very fast and beginning to tiptoe, as he always did when he was getting angry. "That's all you know about it. I'll go and find one of the geisha, and then *won't* you be jealous!"

Miyo flushed. "I shan't!" she replied, snapping her fan so sharply that it nearly broke.

"You will!"

"I shan't!"

"You will!"

"I shan't! I shan't!"

She shook her head till one of the dainty little flowers fell from her carefully piled tresses. But Miyo did not care in the least. She was marching off down the path which led out on to the road to Tokyo.

Makei looked after her gloomily. "That settles it," he muttered; "that's just like a woman—they will argue. She thinks I'm going to speak first, but she's mistaken. I'll never do it. I'm finished with her."

All the same he began to follow down the path.

He had heard a distant peal of laughter. If the other geisha saw her in that dress——

Miyo, looking round and seeing him follow, began to laugh teasingly.

"Don't imagine I'm following you," he said loftily. "I happen to be going this way."

She bowed, rubbing her knees in salutation. "Don't let me stop your Superiority."

He had reached her side, but was apparently more interested in gazing through the shrubbery towards the lower terrace.

"Look there!" he exclaimed.

What woman could resist such a demand? Certainly not Miyo.

She looked, and the exasperating dimple began to play again in her cheek.

"What?" she questioned innocently.

"Don't you see? Near the honourable plum-tree. It's Ito and Umé."

"Yes; but what are they doing?"

Wicked little Miyo was still assuming an air of perplexity, as Makei, yielding to temptation and quite forgetting about Colonel Yamaki's mi-ai on the morrow, slipped his arm round her waist.

"He's doing this," he replied, and looked tenderly down into a half-smiling, half-bashful face.

"How did you learn to do this?" asked Miyo, but she allowed the arm to remain where it was.

She quite well remembered Colonel Yamaki's mi-ai on the morrow,—and it made her enjoy the present all the more.

Makei laughed sheepishly. "Oh, a soldier gets a lot of practice at this sort of thing," he explained.

Miyo freed herself instantly.

"When have you had your practice?" she asked coldly.

"Oh well,—of course I didn't mean—exactly *practice*."

"What then?"

"Well, of course, I'm a shrewd observer. I don't do this sort of thing myself, but I've often watched the other fellows."

"Oh! And what do the other fellows do?"

Makei edged a little nearer again. "Well," he said thoughtfully, "I believe I've seen them put their arms round a mousmé. I'll just show you. Something like this."

He did show her, and Miyo seemed greatly desirous of learning; her small, piquant face was raised to his in most tempting fashion, half in sunlight, half in shadow.

How blue her eyes were, and her cheeks as soft and pink as the cherry-blooms in the orchards. As for her mouth, Makei felt positively guilty as he looked down at the rosy lips, half pouting, daringly inviting, for unluckily he too just then remembered that to-morrow was Colonel Yamaki's mi-ai.

"You're quite sure you've never done this before?" murmured Miyo from the shelter of his arms.

"Oh no," he assured her. "This is only what I've seen the other fellows do."

"You seem to be a very shrewd observer, Cousin Makei. And then?"

"Why, then——" The rosy lips were very near and Makei determined to think of nothing at all but

the present moment of enchantment. "Well, I learned this at Port Arthur — it's a European custom."

Her soft breath fanned his cheek, blue eyes were expectant—mischievous—tender.

"What? I love—European customs."

"Well,—as far as I could make out—watching it from a distance, you understand—it's something like—this."

He only had to bend such a very little way—and who could have resisted doing it? Certainly not Makei, though he felt like a naughty boy caught stealing plums when Miyo sprang back, gasping, indignant, laughing all at once.

"Oh!—you wretch!" she scolded, and then—seeing his shamed face—"you are sure you only saw it from a distance?"

"A very long distance. I—I'm quite a novice at this sort of thing."

Miyo smiled and stole forward—a little nearer. She might find it impossible to learn when it was a question of the three obediences, but when it came to be her turn to teach she apparently found it easier.

And what place could have been found more suitable for the lesson than under the plum-trees in the Garden of Sweet Content?

They neither of them remembered that Colonel Yamaki's mi-ai was fixed for the morrow, or that Makei had merely come to this miserably improper tea-house to take away his little Cousin Miyo.

It happened that Makei was now too busy learning the difficult yet altogether easy lesson that Miyo San taught so well.

CHAPTER XVI

YAMAKI THE BENEFICENT

The notary had been found without loss of time. Hashimoto knew how to bustle things in a crisis like this—and it made him sweat with apprehension to think that the anger of the gods might be poured forth at any moment on the unfortunate head of Hana San's miserable owner.

Had not Suki said he had seen the Earth-dragon wagging his tail?—whilst the thought of the trembling, rumbling, fiery mountains fairly made poor Hashimoto's head buzz.

"There are the indentures," he said hurriedly to the bowing, knee-rubbing notary. "Go to my room at once and finish the transfer."

The little man, after a due number of kowtows, bowed himself off, and Hashimoto, drawing his kimono around him, sighed a sigh of heartfelt relief. He even managed a chuckle as he thought how cleverly he had cheated those augustly tiresome gods of their vengeance, transferring it to Suki's self-sacrificing shoulders.

He started as he felt a hand on his shoulder, but it was only Colonel Yamaki after all, so he bowed gracefully and smiled benignly on this honourable patronizer of tea-houses, wine and geisha.

"I've been looking for you," said Yamaki grimly. "You seem in a good humour."

Hashimoto nodded. "Yes, Superiority. I've had a bit of luck. Suki, the fortune-teller, who has just come back from the war——"

"Suki? Lord of hell! Suki the fortune-teller? You mean he is alive?"

Colonel Yamaki was undoubtedly startled by this astounding news.

"Yes, yes," replied Hashimoto, in haste to get on with his story. "He tells me that he never was dead. But he also tells me *I* soon shall be if I'm not careful."

"Why?"

Yamaki was still thinking of this unpleasantly awkward resurrection of Suki's.

"Why," said Hashimoto confidentially, "he's found out that the honourable gods are miserably and lamentably offended with me for taking Hana's indentures."

At the mention of Hana's name Yamaki became interested.

"Oh, that's the game, is it?" he demanded.

"Yes, yes. But it's all right. Would you honourably believe that I've actually persuaded the poor fool to take the lamentable curse of the august gods on himself?"

Yamaki's cunning eyes began to twinkle.

"Banzai!" he ejaculated, and looked long and craftily at the simple face of the tea-house keeper. "But why let Suki do this?" he asked cautiously. "He's your friend, isn't he?"

"M—yes."

"Then you must not so miserably sacrifice him. I will take Hana."

Hashimoto gasped.

He did not know that he was in possession of so many self-sacrificing friends.

"You?" he questioned.

Yamaki, thinking he read hesitation in the wavering eyes, and in nervous fear of interruption, went a step farther.

"I'll give you a thousand yen into the bargain," he said.

Hashimoto began softly to rub his hands. When it came to a matter of bargaining he could be shrewd enough. If this *friend* chose to be a bigger fool than the other, he would see that he paid well for his generosity.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed; "of course you are only joking. A thousand yen for the most popular geisha in Japan? Why, ten thousand would be a cheap price for her."

Yamaki's dark face flushed; he was anxious to find Tanaka, who had been making inquiries for him as to the probability of Fujiwara arriving in time to be present at the Court of Inquiry which was to be held at the War Office at three o'clock. On Fujiwara's appearance or absence hung, to a great extent, all Yamaki's schemes—possibly his reputation.

His anxiety made him irritable, so that he longed very intensely to seize Hashimoto by the throat and strangle the bargaining devil out of him there and then.

But Yamaki knew the lesson of self-control, and

he intended to conclude this bargain, which he foresaw might be a trump card in the playing of a tricky game.

"I'll give you ten thousand yen for Hana San," he replied smoothly.

Hashimoto rubbed his forehead. This fool made fleecing veritable child's sport. Yet he was a fool himself to price his bargain so low. The thought of the fiery mountains had confused him in the working out of this ingenious problem.

"I really don't think I ought to take fifteen, Augustness," he whined. "She really is worth twenty."

Yamaki scowled. "I'm in no mood for haggling," he replied. "Get me the indentures at once, and I'll give you thirty thousand yen."

Hashimoto positively reeled beneath this munificence. Never in the honourable profession of bargaining had he heard of a man being fool enough to give more than was asked.

Probably the war had had the effect of turning the august Colonel's brain.

"You mean it?" he asked doubtfully.

"Yes. Come, and I'll find you the money."

Hashimoto obeyed with alacrity. Surely the gods were smiling on him already—their anger averted and the Earth-dragon snoozing again—especially in the neighbourhood of poor Hashimoto, who only wanted to be rich and did not wish to do anything wrong.

Hardly had the strangely assorted pair gone off to conclude their bargain than Lieutenant Ito arrived, breathless with running, flushed with excitement.

"Makei!" he cried; "Makei!"

The shout was loud enough to shake all the little gods on the kamidana, but it did not bring Makei, who was busy learning a delightful lesson in the tea-house garden.

"Makei!" bellowed the excitable Ito, "Fujiwara has arrived! Lord of hell! Makei! Where are you?"

He went rushing off again, and so missed seeing Makei and Miyo, who came stealing back reluctantly to the tea-house.

Makei had at last conceived some vague idea that his name was being called, and Miyo had a still vaguer notion that she ought to be changing that delightful geisha dress and becoming little Miyo-ko-San again.

It was a lamentable pity they both agreed, and were feeling exceedingly depressed with thoughts of the morrow, when they looked up and saw Captain Fujiwara himself standing before them.

But if they were surprised, Fujiwara was ten times more so.

"Makei! Miyo!" he exclaimed, and his eyes were riveted on the latter in that unaccountable dress. "Who would have thought of seeing you here? I wondered when I first received that telegram—but to find Miyo San in a tea-house is the greatest wonder of all!"

Miyo laughed and blushed. She was feeling strangely elated all at once.

"There's a still greater surprise in store for you," she nodded.

"There couldn't be!"

Miyo clapped her hands, whilst Makei remembered that he must really go at once and find where that tiresome Ito had disappeared to.

"Look!" cried Miyo, gathering up her long kimono in one hand, whilst with her fan she pointed towards the tea-house. "What do you say to that?"

Before them, looking in dazed wonder towards Fujiwara, stood Hana.

It was quite time for Miyo to go and change her dress.

"Hana!"

The name came in a glad cry from the young soldier's lips, as, forgetful of all else save the fact that the woman he loved stood before him, he strode to her side. There was no formal salutation, but he had taken both cold little hands in his, looking hungrily down into the sweet face.

"At last!" he said, and there was a deep note of joy in his voice that thrilled her. "At last! I have been dreaming of this meeting every hour since I left you standing on the hill in the shadow of the old shrine."

"You have thought of me?"

She spoke wistfully as one who looks back on some closing door for a last glimpse of forbidden joys beyond.

"You have filled my thoughts," he cried. "You have been my life."

Hana looked up quickly. Yes, it *was* he—her lover himself, more handsome, stronger, braver than ever.

"But the war—the danger?" she faltered.

"I never thought of that," he replied. "Through

the long night marches I fixed my gaze on a star and thought 'that star shines over Hana.' In the bustle of battle the beating of my heart was like a clarion call rousing me to fight—so that I might the sooner return to Hana."

She shivered, bowing her head as a flower might do before a wintry blast.

"No, no," she moaned. "It is impossible. Our ways lie apart."

His clasp on her hands only grew firmer.

"Never again," he cried triumphantly. "I have learned to value the treasure I found at Tsumura. I have learned to realize how empty and impossible life would be without you. But you? Did *you* remember? Did *you*, anata, think of the day when we should meet again?"

Again her dark little head drooped low. Ah! what should she say? What would *he* say when he knew—half a truth?

"I tried to forget," she whispered.

But he would not understand.

"And could not?" he laughed, bending to look into hidden eyes.

"To try to forget was not the hardest," Hana answered.

"What could be harder," he insisted—"if you cared?"

She drew a breath, long and painful, whilst her lids fluttered beneath his gaze.

"Trying to wish to be forgotten is far harder than trying to forget," she replied enigmatically.

"The greatest fault," he whispered, "is to deny the gift of the gods."

He drew her forward into his arms as he spoke, with so masterful a gesture that she yielded, scarcely conscious of anything but a sudden great content.

Why battle and question against fate? The future was with the gods—the present was their own.

"Joy of my eyes," Fujiwara was murmuring passionately, "you are content to remain here always?"

She looked up. It might only be the briefest of presents, yet she was too weak to refuse the joy of it.

"I am nothing," she answered simply. "If it please you to take me, let it be according to your desire."

His clasp tightened about her. "Now that I have found you again, little Flower of my Heart, nothing shall part us—nothing."

There was a defiance, almost a challenge, in the words, echoed by the mournful cry of a crane from the lake close by. There was fear in the sound which echoed with chill foreboding in Hana's gentle heart.

How dark it was growing, though it must still be early—and the sultry stillness around oppressed her. Or was it that the fear lay deeper—at her very heart?

Unnoticed, Colonel Yamaki had entered the garden and stood with folded arms and sinister smile watching the two lovers.

He had heard Fujiwara's defiant avowal, he was listening now to Hana's timid response.

"Nothing?" she echoed, her dark eyes, so full of

undefined suffering, raised to the eager ones which looked down on her. "Who knows? Even now there is a stillness in the air that frightens me. Hark! It seemed to me that the earth itself trembled."

Her heart beat wildly against his, but whilst he hastened to soothe her fears with words of love, Yamaki came forward, his eyes narrowing as he looked from one to the other.

"Sorry," he began suavely, "to interrupt the honourable—entertainment." He paused, turning to Fujiwara. "So you have come home?" he went on slowly.

Fujiwara flushed. He was angry at the interruption, angrier still to notice the look Yamaki had directed towards Hana.

"Yes," he said abruptly, "you did not expect—or perhaps greatly desire to see me alive again. I've come back to snatch the laurels from your brow."

It was an unwise boast.

Yamaki laughed as though the jest amused him immensely.

"Certainly," he mocked, "your Superiority may gather your wintry laurels if you can. I can afford to buy summer flowers. Hana Ko, my guests await you. Go!"

He pointed authoritatively towards the tea-house, whilst Hana, dazed at first by this unexpected command, hesitated.

"My guests await," repeated Yamaki, bowing, but his eyes threatened.

Was it not a geisha's duty to smile and obey?

He had already enforced that teaching upon Hana San once to-day.

She turned, remembering, and went towards the tea-house without attempting to look again at Fujiwara, who stood as a man in a dream, staring after her vanishing figure.

Yamaki's loud laugh roused him to knowledge of the present.

"Nice girl, isn't she?" the Colonel was asking carelessly. "So affectionate and clinging. I told you at Tsumura that I meant to secure her. While you are bored with dreary talk about laurels at the War Office, it may refresh you to think of the fragrance of my flower—my sweet little Hana! Sayonara!"

He saluted the still rigid Fujiwara and followed Hana into the tea-house; the clatter of his boots and clanking of his sword echoed in the listener's ears, as did those last mocking words.

"I meant to secure her . . . my sweet little Hana! Sayonara!"

And he had let him go with those words unavenged.

CHAPTER XVII

FUJIWARA HEARS HALF A TRUTH

"We are waiting, sir, to go to the General!"

Makei's words were impatient as their speaker seemed to be excited. By his side was Suki the fortune-teller, or rather Suki the "modest hero of Japan," in his Guides' dress.

Fujiwara did not appear to hear, he was standing just where Hana had left him; his face was ghastly.

"We have only just time to get to the Inquiry," suggested Suki blandly.

"You haven't a moment to spare!" exclaimed Ito, who had followed the others. "The Court meets at three o'clock."

Fujiwara turned lack-lustre eyes on his friends.

"Why is Hana San here with Yamaki?" he asked hoarsely.

Makei opened his mouth, but Suki interrupted, kowtowing respectfully. "Honourably permit, Superiority. I hate to interfere in other people's business, but this is where I must explain. This is where I am indispensable. I promised never, never to tell the truth, and up to now I never, never have. But this is one of the great occasions when the strict rules of a whole lifetime must go snap."

Fujiwara frowned. He was in no mood for Suki's pleasantries.

"Speak, man, speak!" he cried.

"It is wonderfully simple," explained Suki, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders. "It was I who persuaded Hana to be a geisha. It was I——"

Fujiwara looked as though he were listening to the ravings of a maniac.

"A *geisha!*" he cried.

Suki saluted deferentially. "Yes, Augustness. She is the most wonderful geisha in Japan. It was I who saw the chance and snapped at it. It was I who—persuaded her——"

"You!" cried Fujiwara, as though awakening to the truth of some horrible reality. "You meddling, blundering busybody."

He had leapt upon the unfortunate Suki as he spoke, seizing him by the throat as though he intended to throttle him.

In that moment of blind rage it is quite possible he might indeed have committed some such terrible crime had not Ito and Makei interfered.

"Fujiwara, are you mad?" cried Makei.

But his friend would not listen. He had flung Suki violently from him on to the ground, where he lay, gasping in sheer surprise at being the object of such an assault.

"Goddess of Mercy!" groaned Fujiwara. "A geisha!"

His chin sank on his breast, he was the personification of despair. A geisha! His pure and lovely Hana San, the singing-bird of the holy

shrine who had embodied all that was sweet and beautiful in womanhood. A hideous picture of a gaudily attired dancing-girl with swaying body, whitened cheeks and painted eyelids rose before him. He seemed to hear the beating of her little drum, to listen to the loud applause of bold admiration, to see—— He shuddered, covering his eyes. *This* then was the Hana San who had been awaiting his return! Her joy at seeing him just now, her readiness to receive his embrace, had been part of her daily business as public geisha.

"If your Superiority had only given me time to tell the truth," groaned poor Suki—"and I was getting wonderfully fluent—I would have told you that I have just diddled Hana's indentures out of Hashimoto. Hana is free."

He rose gingerly to his knees, rubbing himself gently in self-compassion, whilst the mild reproach in his eyes should surely have touched a harder heart than Fujiwara's.

And Fujiwara *was* touched. In fact he was remorseful, joyous, doubtful, and breathlessly eager all at once.

"Free!" he cried, whilst Makei and Ito echoed the words. "*You* have done this?"

Suki managed to scramble to his feet, he was stroking his windpipe to make sure it was not really dislocated.

"Yes," he said, with soldier-like brevity.

Fujiwara's emotion was great. "How can I thank you," he muttered. "Suki, you are a genius."

Suki smiled. He had known all about that years ago.

"Precisely, Augustness," he murmured; "but why use genius to sweep the mats when you can buy a broom for one sen?"

Fujiwara did not reply. Unlike Hashimoto he had no mind for problems. It was quite sufficient for him to know that Hana was free. But Suki's spirits were rising. He had discovered that his windpipe was none the worse for its squeezing, and here in good time came Hashimoto himself—an excellent example to prove the full extent of his genius upon.

"Here is the man," he whispered confidentially in Fujiwara's ear. "A simple soul, sir. I do what I like with him. Just watch—*this is a comedy*. Now Hashimoto, my man of brains, we have come for the indentures."

He rubbed his hands briskly, winking at Makei, who appeared thoroughly to enjoy the joke.

Hashimoto came shuffling along, hugging himself closely. He was the happiest man in Tokyo at that moment, for was not the anger of the gods appeased, and he himself the richer by thirty thousand yen *in cash* for having directed their wrath upon another's head?

Colonel Yamaki, standing in the shadow, half hidden by the trailing festoons of wistaria which had before concealed little Miyo, smiled suavely. He, too, expected to witness a—comedy.

"Indentures?" said Hashimoto, chuckling. "What, you still want them?" And he peered up at Suki with sly enjoyment.

"No, of course I don't *want* them," replied Suki in his lordliest manner; "but I am willing to oblige you."

Hashimoto pushed up his spectacles on to his forehead, whilst Makei retreated precipitately behind Fujiwara's back to stifle his laughter.

"Ah well," said Hashimoto blandly, "I've been thinking how kind-hearted you were."

Suki saluted gravely. "Yes," he murmured modestly.

"And I don't like to impose on good nature," continued Hashimoto.

"It's nothing, my dear fellow. Nothing at all. After seeing what was so lamentably hanging over you it was the simple act of a friend——"

"Exactly—but as I did not want you to be overtaken by a horrible disaster——"

"Of course not."

"I have sold them——"

"*Sold them!*"

Suki's smiling face began to show concern of another kind, whilst Fujiwara turned pale.

"Yes," continued Hashimoto, "for thirty thousand yen!"

Suki collapsed utterly, he had not even strength to enunciate the question which Fujiwara so sternly put.

"To whom?"

Hashimoto was triumphant. "To Colonel Yamaki."

Suki began edging away as fast as he could,—again his windpipe felt miserably uncomfortable—and Fujiwara's face was colourless, though his eyes —well, Suki found that it was the expression of the honourable Captain's eyes that reminded him of his windpipe.

"Honourably permit!" he muttered. "I hate to interfere in other people's business. Good-day."

Hashimoto was still chuckling as he followed after his hastily departing friend.

"I like Suki," he explained. "He's always ready to help anybody."

Fujiwara looked round. What did it all mean? What tragedy was this? Hana a geisha? Hana sold of her own free will into slavery? The slave of such people as Mitsu and Hashimoto; of—— He passed his hand across his forehead. He could not have heard Hashimoto's *last* words aright.

"What does he mean?" he asked hoarsely.

But it was Colonel Yamaki himself who answered him.

"It means," he said, advancing and bowing, "that your friend's clever strategy is very susceptible to accidents. It means that Hana's indentures are mine."

There was a moment's dead silence, broken by Makei's would-be cheerful tones.

"Never mind, Fujiwara," cried the little man; "we must be off. It is time for the Court of Inquiry."

Fujiwara turned on him fiercely. "I'm not coming," he replied.

Then he looked back to where Yamaki stood, smiling and triumphant.

"Come away," said Ito in conciliatory tones; "you'll be late."

"I don't care."

"Don't be a fool," exclaimed Makei irritably; "come!"

But Fujiwara had turned his back on both his friends.

"Mind your own business and leave me to attend to mine," he stormed.

They stared at him—then at each other, shrugging their shoulders. Clearly at the moment he was beyond argument.

Being wise in their generation they walked away. Perhaps presently——

They disappeared down the garden path with its quaint winding ways, and thus out of sight of the two men left facing each other.

Fujiwara was outwardly as calm as his companion, inwardly his whole soul seemed enveloped in a raging fire of passion.

"You say that Hana's indentures are yours?" he said quietly. "I will buy them from you."

Yamaki smiled. This was the crisis up to which he had been working and plotting so carefully for months.

"They are not for sale," he replied.

"All I possess shall be yours," went on Fujiwara, and his dark eyes glowed.

"The estate of a penniless, broken soldier," scoffed Yamaki, enjoying every moment of his triumph.

"I have some remnant of my patrimony——"

"As much perhaps as I might spend on a night's entertainment! Besides, I'm no dealer in geisha!"

"If you take her, Yamaki, you leave me without an ideal—without a hope. I would give my life to make her free."

"What use is that to me? However, since you are so eager, you shall have her on one condition."

Fujiwara's despairing face was suddenly lighted by hope.

"I accept it," he said unhesitatingly.

Yamaki laughed drily. "You don't even ask my conditions?"

"No. What is the price?"

"Hana is yours on condition that you don't stir from this house till the clock has struck four."

Fujiwara stared blankly into the evil malice of the other's face.

"But my appointment at the War Office is for three o'clock," he replied. Yet even as he spoke he began to understand the weaving of a subtle plot.

"Well?" asked Yamaki, smiling encouragingly.

"It means my complete and irrevocable ruin," said Fujiwara, groaning.

"You think the price too high?"

For one brief moment the younger man's anger blazed.

"Lord of hell!" he cried bitterly. "To save Hana from such a cur as you it is cheap!"

Yamaki was not in the least disturbed by this outburst, on the other hand he quite enjoyed it.

"Then here are the deeds," he said, producing the coveted scroll of paper. "On the whole I'm rather relieved. The girl is so embarrassingly affectionate. Besides, I have found a newer toy—who is more attractive."

Fujiwara took the paper—but he did not look up; had he met Yamaki's insolent gaze at that

moment he knew he must have killed him. Yamaki strolled off laughing—perhaps he began to be aware that he stood in a greater danger whilst lingering in that peaceful tea-house than he had allowed himself to encounter during the whole war.

But though he quickened his steps he managed to swagger and laugh till he was finally out of sight of that stiffly-straightened figure whose white face and blazing eyes had caused him an uncomfortable feeling which he might easily have recognized as fear had he chosen to name it.

No sooner had he gone, humming a geisha tune with nonchalant gaiety, than Makei and Ito came hurrying back to their friend.

"Quickly!" cried Makei impatiently. "We shall be late!"

"Come along, Fujiwara," echoed Ito, "there is really no time to be lost."

But Fujiwara shook his head. "I am not going to the War Office," he replied.

The two friends stared aghast.

"But the Court of Inquiry!" cried Makei.

Fujiwara gave a gesture of despair. "What does it matter to me now? I withdraw my claim," he said.

"You're mad!" cried Ito. "Come along!"

"I shall not go!"

"But what's the meaning——"

"Leave me!" pleaded Fujiwara. "For heaven's sake leave me!"

Makei swung on his heel. "Oh, very well!" he retorted angrily. "If I'm not wanted."

Poor Fujiwara!—nerve-racked and despairing as

he was, the importunity of these friends seemed to be the last straw to distract him.

"Can't you—you understand when I ask you not to meddle in my affairs?" he exclaimed angrily.

Makei paused, tiptoeing in his rising wrath.

"Meddle in your affairs!" he crowed in bantam-like indignation, wagging his head emphatically.

Ito drew him away. Clearly it was no use arguing with Fujiwara to-day. If he chose to wreck his own future it was no concern of theirs.

"What can be the matter with him?" he muttered *sotto voce*.

Makei flung away in a passion. "Next time I meddle in your affairs, my friend," he growled, "I shall wait to be asked."

But if he addressed Fujiwara the words fell on deaf ears, for Fujiwara had disappeared into the tea-house.

CHAPTER XVIII

FREE!

"FREE?" whispered Hana. "At last I am free!"

A glorious light shone in the dark eyes which she raised in such entire confidence to Fujiwara.

"Yes—you are free," he replied; but he turned away as he spoke, with neither answering smile nor look for her.

Hana started, drew back and shivered. What could have happened in those brief moments to change a lover into this cold and careless stranger?

She began to tremble, as a lotus-bloom struck by a winter's blast.

"What has happened?" she asked. "I greatly do fear there is an evil spirit in your heart."

Fujiwara laughed bitterly; he had no love-glance for the mousmé whom Yamaki had complained of as *too* affectionate and clinging.

"An evil spirit!" he replied. "Yes. When I saw you with Yamaki at the shrine, you pretended to tremble at his touch."

The colour dyed her pale cheeks in a shamed blush. What did this insult mean?

"Pretended?" she echoed gently.

"Yes," he cried, hot anger rising within him at her seeming innocence. "How else should I call

it when I find you, on my unexpected return, obedient to his call?"

She bowed her dark head submissively.

"I am a geisha. A geisha can only smile and obey."

"Yes," sneered Fujiwara, the more unsparing because his own agony was almost more than he could bear. "The rich Colonel Yamaki has bought you."

This time she did not blush; but every vestige of colour drained from her cheeks, leaving her white and trembling. But it was with indignation now that she shook.

"You have no right to speak these shameful words," she whispered. "It is not true."

He caught her roughly by the hand, drawing her forward so that she was bound to face him, white with shame and misery though she was.

"Then how came your indentures into his hands?" he asked. "You see, I know. But you shall be free to choose again. *I* have bought your indentures from Yamaki."

With all her pain she bore herself proudly—it was the holy miko of the shrine, not the most popular geisha of Tokyo, who answered him.

"You have paid money for me?"

"I have given my soul!" he cried hoarsely. "There is not left to me one generous conviction, not one impulse, not an article of faith, not a hope. I have given all; but there is your freedom."

He loosed her hand, flinging the indentures at her feet; then turning, left her, without offering

another chance for her to explain what he told himself had no explanation.

She had betrayed him! Ruined him!—this girl with the face of a saint and the heart of a Circe. He had told himself that she was his—that nothing could ever separate them—and immediately afterwards had witnessed her instant obedience to his worst enemy's command.

Hana San! The most popular geisha in Japan, whose smiles and kisses were for the richest rather than the worthiest, and whose heart was readily opened by a golden key. And for such an one he had accepted ruin, disgrace, ignominy.

Already it was past four o'clock. He was free to go where he liked and when he liked. The price was paid—Hana was freed—and the honour of a Samurai, proudest of the proud, lay trampled in the dust.

Yamaki had won; he, Fujiwara, had lost all. Yet, as he hurried on through the streets—not noticing in his anguish how strangely dark it was growing, or the oppressive stillness of the atmosphere—he felt that out of the wreck only one thing did he regret with bitter unavailing passion—the love of Hana San. Hana San, the pure, sweet bird-maiden of the shrine whose flower of remembrance even now lay shrivelled and withered against his heart.

A dead flower, he told himself—a dead love, and a broken honour. What mattered anything now? Life was empty—death welcome. Death——

With the word on his lips he suddenly became conscious of a strange moaning sound in the air,

a mysterious echo which caused a curious vibration to pass through him. What was happening? What could it mean? Again it came—that eerie tremor of the earth beneath his feet, the wild moaning as though the air were peopled with myriad ghosts.

Superstitious fear seized him with its grim grasp. He was aware of the gathering darkness—the unnameable terror around. Was it the vengeance of the gods which had suddenly overwhelmed the earth? He tried to cry aloud—but he was dumb, silent and afraid before that vast and limitless horror. Inexplicable as it may seem, in that moment of supernatural dread it was only of himself he thought—though the next he was crying Hana's name in wild appeal. Turning, he tried to retrace his steps, but the darkness was deepening; another terrible moaning surged around, the earth heaved and shook, flinging him violently to the ground, where he lay for several moments stunned and unconscious. When he rose to his feet the darkness was already lifting, the dread of the gods' vengeance had passed from his soul; he thought again of Hana as he looked back along the path towards the town—looked back to where a few minutes before dainty little houses had been standing, carved pagodas, quaint bridges—and saw ruin!

With a cry he sprang forward. "Hana! Hana!" he called in an agony of entreaty. O Hana San!"

But Hana San was far away in the Tea-house of Sweet Content on the other side of the town.

Blind with misery, not knowing how he went and whither going Fujiwara stumbled on. But the first horror passed when he came presently to where, amongst the wreckage of many homes, sights and sounds of human suffering and sorrow met his gaze.

He could not pass them by, those lamentably poor ones, who cried to him for his help, and though his soul cried out too in longing to know the fate of Hana San, he stayed to listen to those piteous entreaties, working with the strength and energy of any two men in rescuing those in danger of suffocation from beneath the débris of their homes.

In Japan the effect of an earthquake is somewhat the same as the collapse of a pack of cards. Yet in spite of every precaution being taken to make the collapse as light and remediable as possible, serious disaster had now overtaken hundreds of the unfortunate people.

Would he ever reach the Tea-house of Sweet Content? Fujiwara was asking himself, when a cry of pain and terror caused a fresh halt before another ruin.

For a moment Fujiwara paused; then, scrambling nimbly across the débris, he began hastily to remove what had once been the roof of one of the larger houses. It was terribly hard work, and he was already nearly exhausted by his exertions coming as they had on the top of severe mental strain.

But the piteous cry, and the sight of a piece of a blue kimono inspired him to fresh efforts. He could not leave this unfortunate fellow-creature to

perish, whatever the cost to himself. Yet he panted, drawing deep and painful breaths as at last he succeeded in raising the heavy fragment of débris which pinned its victim so closely down.

"Quick," he cried. "Crawl out if possible. I cannot long support this weight."

Sweat streamed down his face, but he held bravely to his task, for he fancied he had seen a blue-kimono'd figure rise and crawl slowly forth from beneath the loose débris.

"Are you safe?" he cried, and a faint voice answered in the affirmative.

With a crash Fujiwara allowed the heavy weight to fall, watching it splinter and curl with a hundred echoing snaps; then he turned to find that the man whom he had saved with such difficulty from a miserable death was Tanaka, the editor of the *Tokyo Review,* the associate and creature of Colonel Yamaki.

CHAPTER XIX

THE EARTHQUAKE

LEFT in such summary fashion after hearing words as bitterly unjust as they seemed to her ungenerous, Hana San sank on her mat weeping in heartbroken distress.

She had heard of her freedom from bondage with such wild uplifting of joy, and had hastened in such happy confidence to meet her lover, that his cold scorn, followed by cruel insult and passionate accusation, had half stunned her. And he had gone! Gone, and left her alone here—a poor deserted little mousmé who belonged to none, and in whose fate none were concerned.

Compared to this utter desolation the days of her bondage appeared gilded with light. As a geisha she had always had the consolation—warm and sweet in her heart's depths—that she was the willing sacrifice upon the shrine of love. And now—why, the shrine was broken—the sacrifice spilled and despised.

She was alone, and Fujiwara—the honoured and most exceedingly beloved Fujiwara—had gone, never to come back again.

With white fingers interlaced and shoulders bowed, she cowered there, repeating the terrible

words he had said to her. It hurt her with a mortal anguish to think of them; yet she did it, paining herself ruthlessly in that vain search for explanation or reason.

What did he mean by saying she cared for Yamaki in any other fashion save bitterest hatred? What had he meant by repeating that Yamaki had bought her—soul and body?

For a moment she raised her poor little face, all wet with tears and drawn with pain, yet with a vague hope on it.

Could Fujiwara have been ill—mad—when he spoke like that? It might easily be possible, and—and if so, perhaps he would be sorry—perhaps he might even wish to be forgiven.

It never entered her gentle heart to question her withholdal of forgiveness if he came to seek it. Resentment such as had stung her at first had passed, leaving only a lonely aching which was near to heartbreak.

Would he ever *want* to be forgiven? Or would he always remember her as the woman who had betrayed his honour—lied to him, cheated him?

She rose wearily to her feet, stretching her white arms above her head, the butterfly sleeves falling back from their slim shapeliness.

She had sacrificed herself in vain—all in vain; for had he not spoken of his ruin?—his own utter wrecking of life?

Oh! poor little Hana San could not understand it at all, only she longed very exceedingly to go back to the temple from which she had come—to go back to Kieki, and the quiet hillside, and the

temple pigeons who used to come fluttering around her for the sacred beans she brought them.

And the cherry-blossoms would be a-blow in the temple gardens, where so many light-hearted and honourably happy little mousmés came with friends and lovers for their "first seeing." Tears coursed slowly down Hana San's cheeks as she moved towards the shoji. She must return to Tsumura.

From close by she could hear the gay chorus of the geisha song to the accompaniment of koto and samisen—

> "Gay little, glad little girls are we
> Eager to please and fair to see;
> We like men
> With lots of yen—
> The door of our hearts has a golden key." [1]

And he—Fujiwara—had thought it possible that she was of those who sang such songs, and smiled such smiles—for gold.

She shuddered a little as she passed out through the shoji into the garden. She was free, and she was going home to Tsumura—and Kieki: Kieki who would understand.

Yet even that thought brought no thrill of pleasure. Her heart was heavy—far heavier than when she had said "Sayonara!" to Kieki and the peaceful shrine to come down into this terrible Tokyo.

Then she had been filled with the joy of sacrifice which transcended all pain. Now the world was utter blackness since Fujiwara had gone out of her life—a ruined man for her sake, though not for love's.

[1] By permission of Messrs. Chappell & Co., Ltd.

No song of nightingale, no murmur of insect-life broke the hush without in the garden. A terrible sense of oppression hung over everything.

And how dark it was!

Hana paused on the terrace, looking around. Then—why, she did not know exactly what happened, but a great fear seized her as it had Fujiwara on the hill-road beyond Tokyo. She felt the quivering of the earth beneath her, the frightened screaming of the geisha as they came running out into the open; on all sides cries, shrieks, darkness and terror.

A man rushed past her—through the gloom she recognized Makei, the lover of little Miyo San. And the child herself, where was she?

In a flash she remembered the dressing-up in geisha clothes to tease Makei; and then afterwards how Miyo had come back to change her clothes, but had been persuaded by Giku, one of the youngest and kindest of the little geisha, to permit her to rearrange the fair hair which Japanese mousmés as a rule abhor—declaring nothing but coal-black tresses will win them husbands.

Miyo had gone—the wilful child!—against Hana's wiser judgment, and Hana had not seen her again.

Now, at sight of Makei, white and terrified, come in search of his missing sweetheart, she was filled with self-reproaches.

"Oh, Makei," she cried, "she is still in the tea-house changing her dress. Save her! Save her!"

But Makei did not wait for the last injunction. Already he was crossing the court, pushing his

way through the crowd of women and children who were crying and shrieking, invoking the gods, and declaring that this must be the vengeance on some terrible sin. They checked—many of them—at sight of Makei's face, which was as grimly set as though he were charging at the head of his regiment against the terrible Russians. Again that horrible moaning of spirit-voices in the air—again that strange convulsive heaving of the very ground beneath their feet.

"Makei," cried Sumako the geisha, stretching out her hands and trying to clutch at his coat, "it is no use. See—it is the vengeance of the gods—the tea-house is falling; you cannot save her."

Makei did not trouble to reply—already he had entered the rocking, trembling house, leaving the crowd of terrified human beings without to rush shrieking away to the greater safety of open paddy-fields and meadows.

"Miyo! Miyo-ko!"

How hoarse and croaking his voice sounded, like that of the crane down there by the lake-side—the wise old crane who had learnt so much of the wisdom of the past ages.

"Miyo! Miyo!"

Ah! Goddess of Mercy! Where was she? A moment's pause—in which he could hear the straining and creaking of posts and woodwork, the snapping and breaking of rending beams.

"Miyo!"

And this time an answer—

"*Makei, Makei, Makei!*"

He turned hastily in the direction of the cry—

feeling his souls torn with conflicting emotions, and there—yes! there, running towards him, her white-and-blue kimono gleaming in the darkness, came Miyo San. Strung up in her terror, she put one arm around his neck and they both raced up the steps and over the bridges, out into the open grounds, where, feeling safer from the horrible catastrophe, she collapsed and fainted.

Poor little Miyo! All her fun and teasing, all her mischief and waywardness, had gone from her now. She was too frightened even to move when Makei tried to arouse her, so that he was obliged to pick her up bodily in his arms, there and then, running now as fast as his legs would carry him, convinced that he could do any amount of augustly heroic acts as he felt the clinging embrace of soft arms and the pressure of a small tear-stained cheek very close against his own.

"Ah!" gasped Makei, as he lurched forward, stumbling over the gnarled roots of a plum-tree, coming to the ground as carefully as he could under the circumstances, and nobly contriving to get the full brunt of the bruisings. Miyo, brought thus suddenly back to earth, tightened her hold of the hero's neck.

"Makei!" she screamed. "Oh, say you're not killed. Makei!"

Makei sat up—he certainly was bewildered, and in a very literal sense had his hands full.

Miyo was sobbing hysterically, her fair head buried on his shoulder, her arms wound throttlingly round his neck.

"It evidently seems to have been an earthquake,"

Makei was explaining, when once more the earth was filled with strange sounds, the earth heaved more tumultuously than ever, there was a terrible uproar of conflicting noises—the voices of horrified human creatures, the lamentations of animals, the indescribable hubbub of falling houses and trees. Crash! crash! crash! On every side rose the din, and nearer at hand the moaning terror of Miyo San. It certainly was an evening to be remembered.

Presently—silence. Miyo lay quite still—so still that Makei began to grow frightened.

"Miyo—are you alive?" he whispered.

Miyo stirred.

"I'll never, never, never go into that tea-house again," she vowed.

In some vague fashion she was connecting the earthquake with her own disobedient naughtiness.

Makei did not answer—but he smiled.

"I'll read the *Greater Learning for Women* all over again," sobbed the penitent little mousmé. "And I'll never, never go and hunt for fireflies with Makei as I promised."

Makei ceased to smile. He had been looking forward to doing that on his very next visit to Tsumura.

"And I'll marry," went on this virtuous daughter of Japan. "Exactly whom my father w-wants me to, except, of course, any one I don't like, such as that hateful Yamaki."

Makei's face, which had darkened at the beginning of this speech, instantly cleared. And naturally he still held very tight hold of Miyo—for fear of another earthquake, although the darkness was

lifting and the air was cooler and far less oppressive.

In a land where earthquakes are almost everyday occurrences—in minor fashion—one grows wise in looking for signs and tokens. Makei could not now understand why he had not been prepared before the event; but, then, Fujiwara had taken up so much of his thoughts!

"My dear little cousin," he said tenderly, "if you are feeling better after all that, I think we had better commence the honourable return. The General may think he has lost you."

Miyo very reluctantly loosed her clasp round an heroic neck.

"He came lamentably near losing me if it had not been for your Superiority," she replied. "I greatly desire to give you my miserably sincere thanks, Makei."

Through the gloom her small face shone flower-like. And if Makei made immediate use of a European custom, why, Miyo did not scold him at all! Then, hand in hand, they returned towards the tea-house.

Alas! It appeared that the gods had taken Miyo at her word, for it was certain that she never, never, never would enter the Tea-house of Sweet Content again, for it lay spread out at their feet in utter ruin.

Miyo cuddled very close to Makei's side, and Makei, suddenly feeling cold and sick with the apprehension of what might have been, put his arm very closely round her slim little figure.

"If you had not honourably come," whispered

Miyo, "just when you did, poor little Miyo-ko-San would be lying under all that."

She trembled violently. "You have augustly saved my life, Makei," she concluded in a shrill, reed-like voice. "And I—oh! I greatly consider you are the most superiorly noble man in all the world."

And Makei, glowing with pride and joy at the sound of the words, forgot to remember that he had been lamentably to blame in the first place for not having carried Miyo San straight home after finding her in so highly improper a place of amusement as Mitsu's tea-house.

MISS CECILY COURTNEIDGE AS MIYO-KO-SAN

THE PRIEST AND THE SINGING GIRL

CHAPTER XX

TANAKA SHOWS HIS GRATITUDE

"AHA!" quoth Makei drily. "So Yamaki *is* the proprietor of the *Tokyo Review* after all."

Tanaka—a sadder and wiser Tanaka than the tea-house swaggerer of the day before, who had flirted with geisha and scoffed at his betters—kowtowed humbly.

"Most honourably permit," he said. "Of course I've sworn away half my souls in promising never to tell. But last night altered everything."

Makei smiled. "Extraordinary thing," he replied, "that Fujiwara should have lighted on you."

"Superiority, he saved me almost, I might say, at the risk of his life. So miserably exhausted was he with his august exertions that, immediately after getting me out, he fainted away."

"Got you out?" questioned Makei. "What do you mean?"

"Sir, I had half a house upon my miserable body when the noble Fujiwara rescued me. Never shall I forget it."

Makei stroked a smooth chin.

"I hear Yamaki escaped too," he remarked; "which was unfortunate. What a great deal of trouble it would have saved every one if he had been killed instead of those poor little geisha."

Tanaka sighed. "It was the will of the gods," he replied. "But your Augustness may rely on me in future to say whatever you honourably condescend to ask me. Captain Fujiwara is a Samurai before whom my souls kowtow."

"That's all right," said Makei cheerfully. "Of course, there'll be another Court of Inquiry—at least there ought to be if there's any justice to be had in the land. And then there's Hana to be found—no one knows what has become of Hana since the earthquake."

"Hana San the geisha?"

"O Hana San the *ex*-geisha. She has been bought out—or sold out—of Mitsu's troupe for ever. At least, so my honourable little cousin told me."

"The honourable Miyo-ko-San?"

"Yes, yes, yes. But don't ask questions. I read your intention in your eye—but don't do it, Tanaka. It is miserably indiscreet."

"Honourably permit. I was only wondering where O Miyo San heard the news, since Hana was certainly singing at the tea-house yesterday. Yamaki insisted."

"Yamaki is a devil. I suppose I can say that quite freely to-day without expecting a notice of the remark to appear in the *Review?*"

"Your Superiority is welcome to say anything that may assist the cause of Captain Fujiwara."

"Exactly; but I fear the fact that Yamaki *is* a devil—and a clever devil—rather detracts from Fujiwara's hopes of fairplay. However, we'll do our best. Ah, here is General Okubo coming

towards us. It is a good thing he has no idea that Miyo was at the tea-house yesterday when the earth quaked."

"Miyo San in the Tea-house of Sweet Content?"

"S—s—sh, not a word. If Fujiwara knew the fact had been mentioned he would never forgive us. She merely went to see Hana San, who was brought up with her. You understand that, for *Fujiwara's* sake, O Miyo-ko's name must not be mentioned to the General in connection with a tea-house."

Tanaka bowed.

"I will be miserably careful," he promised, and Makei drew a sigh of relief.

General Okubo, a trifle paler than his wont, anxious-eyed and exceedingly busy, came up to where they were standing. He stopped, greeting Makei with a great deal of warmth.

"Ah, boy," he said, after they had saluted each other, "I hear you have been distinguishing yourself. Who is the 'lovely young lady of illustrious family' you rescued so gallantly, eh?"

Makei flushed, whilst Tanaka respectfully answered for him.

"The lady was at the Tea-house of Sweet Content without her august father's consent, Superiority," he said; "she might not like her name mentioned."

The General laughed good-humouredly. Makei had always been a favourite of his.

"I should think not," he agreed. "The distinguished nobleman whose daughter gads about Tokyo tea-houses without his knowledge must be a fool. He needs the help of some bright young rascal like you, Makei, to look after her."

Makei saluted with much deference. "Thank you, sir," he replied. "I may have occasion to give the august lord your honourable opinion."

"By the way," continued the General, "I must tell you my little Miyo's 'first seeing' is to take place to-morrow in the temple grounds at Tsumura. It should have been to-day, but this terrible earthquake shakes such little arrangements out of place. So the mi-ai will be to-morrow—and the Inquiry, which, as you know, should have been finished yesterday, is now postponed till the day after."

Makei bowed, glancing at Tanaka.

If Fujiwara's friends could not accomplish something in two days, it would be unforgivable. The worst of it seemed to be that Fujiwara was apparently determined to be his own worst enemy.

"I hope O Miyo San is honourably well," he said hesitatingly. Both he and Miyo had been fortunate in escaping the *dénouement* of her disobedience yesterday, since the General's Tokyo house had not been destroyed in the earthquake, and Miyo had arrived safely home before her anxiously distracted father managed to quit the War Office.

The General nodded. "She is at Tsumura with O Hana San," he said, "busy in tending the motherless children who lost their parents in last night's lamentable disaster."

Tanaka immediately made a note for his paper. He understood from Makei that any praise awarded to O Hana San would be acceptable to Fujiwara.

The General, remarking his employment, turned to him.

"I see by your paper," he said, "that Captain Fujiwara was busy last night."

"He was everywhere, Superiority," replied Tanaka, with enthusiasm. "I am one of the many whose lives he saved."

The General sighed, his face clouding. "I used to like that young fellow," he muttered.

Makei the irrepressible put in his word: "Fujiwara," he said, "is always doing heroic things, and others take the credit."

General Okubo frowned. "Silence, boy," he replied sternly. "Fujiwara had a chance of stating his case yesterday, and did not so much as take the trouble to attend the Court of Inquiry."

Makei began tiptoeing in his excitement. "The earthquake, sir——" he urged.

The General raised his hand. "Began after the hour of Fujiwara's appointment at the War Office. I have since learnt—not an hour ago, in fact—that he was dissipating with geisha at the tea-house. Excellent employment, Makei, for a soldier of the Emperor, and a son of Japan, to be engaged in when his honour is at stake."

Makei flushed. It was not often that the kind-hearted old General expressed himself so severely, but the truth was that Okubo had suffered serious disappointment at the seeming defection of one of his favourite officers, and judged him accordingly.

Tanaka, during these last speeches, had been drawn aside by a new-comer to the little group.

Colonel Yamaki—who had *not* covered himself with glory during the events of last night—looked very gloomy this morning.

"What do you miserably mean," he growled to Tanaka under his breath, "by filling the paper with praise of Fujiwara?"

Tanaka looked a trifle nonplussed. He had always stood in awe of the august proprietor of his paper; but gratitude was still dominant in his heart towards his last night's rescuer. The weight of half a house had been an unpleasant reminder of how easily a man's souls may be separated from his body!

"Captain Fujiwara saved my life," he said simply.

Yamaki's next speech might not have been flattering had not the General claimed his attention.

"I am greatly desirous of knowing, Colonel," he demanded quietly, "how the *Tokyo Review* got hold of the announcement of your marriage? It is decidedly premature."

Yamaki saluted with graceful assurance.

"Honourably permit, sir," he replied. "It was certainly scandalous. I was immediately complaining to Tanaka San."

Tanaka looked uncomfortable. He knew Makei was glaring at him, but remained uncertain as to whether gratitude need go to the length of giving his honourable patron the lie. He was aware that Yamaki had the reputation of being a singularly unpleasant enemy. A poor journalist, however grateful, runs some risk in securing such a foe.

But Makei did not interfere this time, or even continue to glare upon the doubting Tanaka, since already Fujiwara and Lieutenant Ito were seen approaching.

At first it seemed that Fujiwara would have turned aside across a bridge to the right, but either Ito, or his own discretion, persuaded him against this, for he eventually came forward, saluting the General gravely.

Yamaki, at sight of his rival, also stepped a little nearer to the General; his eyes seemed to have narrowed, and though he smiled he did not appear altogether at his ease.

As for Makei, he greeted his friend warmly, quite forgetful of their little quarrel of the preceding day, or his own laudable resolution never again to interfere in other people's concerns.

"You've come, after all," he whispered, and nodded encouragingly.

The General's reception of a quondam favourite was not reassuring, and his salute the stiffest imaginable.

"I expected you, sir, yesterday," he said in icy tones of displeasure.

Fujiwara glanced quickly at Yamaki, whose set grin had little amusement but much mockery.

At sight of him Fujiwara turned pale. After the excitement of last night he had been having quiet and very bitter time for reflection.

And he had not found Hana—only the ruined débris of a tea-house. Haunted by a hundred fears as to the fate of one he knew he must still love with unquenchable fervour, even though love were turned to most cruel pain, he was not disposed to look with friendly eyes at the man who had robbed him of her.

So his reply was brief—almost to defiance—as

he turned to his General: "I regret, sir, that I was prevented from attending the Inquiry."

The General knitted his brows in a frown, but he was already beginning to find it harder to believe in the crimes imputed to this young man who met his keen gaze so fearlessly.

"Nothing should prevent a soldier from attending to his duty," he replied, but with less severity than before. "Fortunately for you, the earthquake caused the Inquiry to be postponed till the day after to-morrow. But still I should like to hear your explanation?"

There was a pause.

Makei and Ito, even Tanaka, all looked anxiously at Fujiwara, who was very pale, but did not exhibit any other token of emotion.

Here was an opportunity to be grasped; but would he grasp it?

Yamaki was asking himself that question with an equal anxiety. Fujiwara, looking up, caught the threatening gleam in sinister eyes and remembered Hana.

Poor little Hana San! Even if she were dead, lying crushed and lifeless, like some broken lotus-bloom, beneath a ruined tea-house, her reputation should be the jealous charge of one who had loved even whilst he reproached her. Poor little Hana San! And Yamaki was merciless.

Fujiwara squared his shoulders resolutely. The General had asked for an explanation. If he gave it the name of Hana San must be trailed through the dust of dishonour.

"I have none to give, sir," he replied.

Makei groaned aloud, whilst Ito dropped back, grimacing in his disgusted rage, to a place beside Tanaka.

The General himself seemed to be disappointed.

"But what will you tell the Court?" he urged.

"I shall not attend it."

Worse and worse! Makei threw up his hands with a gesture of despair. Clearly Fujiwara was quite mad. What could the best of friends do against such folly?

"But—but——" urged the General, who was inwardly chafing against this incomprehensible conduct on the young officer's part, and already beginning—shrewd old man that he was—to suspect some deeper plot behind it all in which Fujiwara's honour might appear in a very different light—"do you realize that you are deliberately throwing up your career as a soldier?"

A moment's tense pause.

"Quite," replied Fujiwara briefly.

Yamaki drew back his breath in a low hiss. This idiot was more monstrously an idiot than he could have believed. Yet it was an idiocy which fitted in exceedingly well with his own plans!

"This is ridiculous!" exclaimed the General. "Come, come, Fujiwara, I have known you from a boy. Your father, my old comrade in arms, fell at my side. Tell me all about it."

His tones were more and more conciliatory as that inner suggestion made itself heard with growing conviction.

Fujiwara had not the appearance of a guilty man or of a coward.

"Your kindness is making it very hard for me, sir," said the latter huskily. "But—there is nothing I can say."

The General shook his head sadly. "Your obstinacy, then, leaves me no alternative," he said, with dignity. "I *must* believe what you dare not contradict. Send in your papers—and good-bye."

He saluted gravely and turned away, with obvious reluctance, going slowly, hoping perhaps that the young man would retract those last words of his and explain the seeming mystery.

But Fujiwara only saluted respectfully. "Thank you, sir," he replied; "and good-bye."

The General crossed the road towards the bridge. Yamaki, well aware that those who remained behind were no friends to him, also saluted with a mocking air, proceeding to follow his senior officer.

"You have heard, sir?" he observed as he passed Fujiwara. "Good-bye."

A haughty smile curved the young Samurai's lips.

"Don't be afraid, Colonel," he replied. "A gentleman is a gentleman—even to a blackguard."

Yamaki scowled and hurried on, beckoning to Tanaka to come with him.

But Tanaka happened to be looking in another direction.

There was silence between the three friends, who still stood facing each other after Yamaki and the General were out of sight.

Then Ito spoke, deliberately and with emphasis.

"Fujiwara," he said, "you are a fool."

Makei had been tiptoeing and swelling out his chest like an angry bantam for the last ten minutes.

"Childish, I call him!" he fumed.

Fujiwara laughed, and, though his eyes were very sad, there was some latent amusement in his mirth.

These two faithful friends touched him by their warm championship in spite of their quaint scolding of his shortcomings.

"We can't all be as venerable as you are, Makei," he replied, patting the irate little fellow on the back.

Ito frowned. "Makei may be young," he said severely, "but he has more sense than *you* have."

Fujiwara wagged his head in mock conviction.

"Makei never was young," he asserted. "In his previous time on earth he was an owl and accumulated centuries of experience."

But Makei was nursing a personal grievance in addition to his outraged sense of friendship, and refused even to smile.

"All I know is, that by leaving the field to Yamaki you practically give him my Miyo," he said gloomily.

"Don't you believe it, my aged young friend," smiled Fujiwara, trying to assume a gaiety he was very far indeed from feeling; "Miyo will never marry any man unless she wants to. Where is she?"

Makei hunched his shoulders. "Nursing squalling children in her illustrious father's park at Tsumura—with Hana."

Fujiwara started, a light springing to his eyes, though his lips tightened in the effort after self-control.

"Hana?" he echoed. "*Hana?* Then . . . she was not in . . . in the tea-house . . . at the time of the earthquake?"

Makei looked at him curiously. "No," he said; "that she certainly was not, for I happened to meet her in the garden just after the first tremors were felt. All the geisha and tea-house girls were making a terrible din, shrieking and screaming as though they expected the Earth-dragon to appear in their midst any moment. And they were all so busy running away—little cowards!—that they never thought of poor Miyo."

"But Hana—what of Hana?" asked Fujiwara impatiently. "Was she running away, too?"

"Not with the geisha and those others. No, no. I did not wait to ask her, because Miyo was in danger; but I imagine she had been running away before, and when the first warning of danger came she remembered Miyo—like the brave little mousmé she is, and began running back to save her, only I happened to come along and so did the honourable business for her."

"But what happened to Hana afterwards? Where was she going?"

"My dear Fujiwara, why don't you go to Tsumura and ask her these things yourself? I can assure you I was much too busy looking after Miyo."

Fujiwara gave a gesture of impatience. "How do you know she is at Tsumura?" he demanded.

It was Makei who began to grow impatient.

"Because the General happened to mention it a few minutes ago," he retorted. "As I told you,

they are looking after all the children whose parents got mislaid during the earthquake. I am sure they will be delighted to have your assistance."

But Fujiwara shook his head. "Hana and I have spoken our last good-bye," he said quietly.

Makei stared aghast; certainly this incomprehensible friend of his was growing madder and madder every moment. Both he and Ito had previously decided together that Hana had been in some inscrutable measure the stumbling-block in the clearing of Fujiwara's honour.

And now—was it possible they heard aright? Fujiwara spoke of Hana as a dream of the past; a hope to which he had bidden an eternal farewell. What, then, remained to explain the inexplicable?

"Why?" he questioned. "What——"

It was not often that Makei's tongue failed him, but it failed now.

"I'll go and see Miyo when she is alone," went on Fujiwara quietly, "and then—Sayonara to our beautiful Japan and the service of his illustrious Majesty our Emperor."

Makei was silent, too nonplussed to grow angry. Only Ito managed to find his voice.

"Well, really," said he, "if I had not mentioned it already, I should be almost tempted to tell you again——"

"What?" demanded Fujiwara, smiling sadly.

"That you are a fool!" exclaimed Ito, in a fury.

CHAPTER XXI

LOVERS' QUARRELS

"Ah, Miyo-ko-San, guess whom I have brought to see your Superiority."

Miyo pursed her lips meditatively. "I cannot guess," she replied. "I have had so much to think of lately, what with tea-houses, and European customs, earthquakes and babies—not to mention to-morrow's mi-ai with that miserably *dis*honourable inferiority Colonel Yamaki, my brain is quite in a whirl."

"Aha!" chuckled Makei, "I see you have not yet begun again to read the lesson of the three obediences from the *Omna Dai Gakku* which you have promised to learn by heart."

Miyo tilted her pretty chin and began to fan herself very fast. "Who did you say has come to see me, Lieutenant Makei?" she demanded in her most distant manner.

Makei bowed profoundly. "Captain Fujiwara!" he announced.

Miyo's face brightened, she left off fanning herself and came running up to Makei's side.

"To see Hana?" she queried breathlessly.

"No; he says he will not see her at all. He only wishes to make Miyo-ko-San his honourable farewell."

"It is simply childish," declared the small woman

of the world indignantly. "However, we must make him change his mind."

"That is what I told him."

Miyo glanced round nervously, laying her finger to her lips.

"Sh-sh-sh! Here is Hana. She is staying with me for a few hours helping with the babies—poor little frightened things! Now take care, Makei, and I'll talk to *her*. I can twist her round my little finger!"

As she spoke Hana entered. A pale, sad-faced Hana, dressed once more in the soft, pearl-grey kimono of a miko.

Makei cast an admiring glance at her as he made his salutation, which she returned with sweet graciousness.

"I am sorry if I intrude at an impolite time," she said gently, looking from one to the other, and would have withdrawn had not the ever impulsive Miyo run forward and caught her hand.

"Nonsense, it is only little Makei," she cried, with a mischievous glance over her shoulder towards her cousin. "We were speaking of the foolishness of lovers' quarrels."

Hana smiled. She loved these two children with their transparent simplicity of heart.

"Yes?" she said.

"Yes!" echoed Makei encouragingly. "We have made up *our* minds that there is nothing so silly."

"Oh, I am glad," said Hana innocently, as she drew Miyo close to her side. "Then you are never going to quarrel any more."

Miyo opened her blue eyes wide in astonishment.

"Oh, *we* never quarrel," was her instant disclaimer. "We——"

The dimple was coming and going in her pink cheek in that provoking fashion which made Makei think very hard about European customs.

"Oh no!" he echoed emphatically. "We never quarrelled since—I don't know when."

"Not since he saved my life," declared Miyo in triumph.

"That was last night," suggested Hana slyly.

Miyo blushed. "Ye-es," she said.

"But it isn't the time that counts," cried Makei, with enthusiasm, as he eyed the dimple covetously, "it's the principle."

"Of course," agreed Hana cheerfully. "Now you have seen the folly of it you'll be different, won't you?"

Miyo wrinkled a white brow. "We were not speaking of ourselves," she reproved.

"No?"

Hana was still unsuspicious.

Clearly with so obtuse a person to deal with plain speaking must be resorted to.

Miyo laid her hands on Hana's breast, looking with some severity into the placid face.

"We were speaking of you and Captain Fujiwara," she said. "We've made up our minds to bring you together."

"Yes," echoed Makei, "Fujiwara is here. I will bring him to you."

How easy of accomplishment it all seemed—this little scheme of peace-making!

But at the first mention of Fujiwara's name all the placidity had left Hana's face, which grew crimson from chin to brow.

"Honourably forgive that I should seem ungrateful," she faltered; "but—you must not bring Captain Fujiwara to me. I—I greatly desire *not* to see him again."

She freed herself from Miyo's embrace as she spoke, walking slowly away so that her face was hidden from her companions. A slender, drooping figure on which the warm sunshine glinted as it poured down upon her.

Miyo looked and frowned, so did Makei. They could both guess very well that that grey kimono hid a sore and aching heart; but somehow they showed their pity in outward resentment.

"Well," muttered Makei in an undertone, "I thought Fujiwara was a stubborn mule, but she's ten thousand times worse. It's always the women who make trouble with their whims and spites and jealousies."

Miyo had been blinking very hard so that no one might suspect the presence of tears in her blue eyes, and this speech of Makei's made excellent excuse to prove to him—and herself—that she was not in the least thinking of crying.

"Indeed!" she fired, "that's what *you* think, is it? I'm glad I found it out in time!"

Makei began to rise up and down on his toes very quickly.

"Oh! now *your* little temper's going, is it?" he scoffed, and it was, of course, temper, not emotion that made his voice so husky.

"*My* temper!" cried Miyo shrilly—quite forgetful of the cause of the dispute. "How dare you say that I have a temper?"

Hana heard the demand and turned swiftly back, coming across to where two angry little people stood glaring at each other.

"Please, please," she entreated, "this is all my fault."

"It is nothing at all to do with you," replied Makei severely.

"Honourably please to let me make peace between you!" begged Hana—and made no secret of the tears in her own eyes.

But Miyo was quivering with anger. "Don't you interfere, Hana," she commanded. "I greatly desire to have nothing more to do with him." And she turned her back on them both.

"You mean that?" demanded Makei in a voice of ominous warning, whilst he glared at the back of a blue embroidered obi with extraordinary venom since blue eyes were hidden from him.

Poor Hana was in despair. "Please, honourably please," she entreated.

"It's no use making excuses for her," snarled Makei. "She's a perverse, cross-grained——"

Miyo swung round, stamping her foot with naughty passion.

"It's no use making excuses for him," she cried. "He's a miserably over-bearing, bullying——"

Makei did not wait for more. "Have the last word," he cried, shaking a clenched fist in his little sweetheart's direction. "I've done with you for ever."

Hana looked sorrowfully at Miyo. "Now see what you've done," she murmured.

To her surprise Miyo, instead of showing any signs of penitence or regret, merely burst into laughter.

"I don't care," she retorted.

"But—he said he had done with you for ever!"

Miyo began to fan herself with the most unconcerned air.

"What a serious little innocent you are," she said. "That only means that he'll be back in ten minutes to ask my pardon."

"Then you are not troubled?"

"Of course not!"

Hana sighed. "It is all so strange to me. I thought that love must be woven of sunbeams—and that a shadow would kill it," she whispered, whilst that look of tragic suffering stole back once more into her dark eyes.

"You make a miserable mistake, Hana," she said, with much reproof in her voice. "It is you people who take marriage seriously who make yourselves so wretched. When *I* am married I shall teach Makei to remember that I am the daughter of an English mother. English women rule their husbands exactly as a Japanese mother-in-law rules her daughter-in-law. So I shall be English, even though I never, never wish to leave Japan."

Hana could not forbear a sly thrust. "Is it not on the honourable morrow that your illustrious father has fixed a mi-ai between you and Colonel Yamaki?" she asked innocently.

"Yes," she replied, "and I am going to enjoy

myself very much indeed at that honourable entertainment. It is to be in the temple grounds, under the cherry-trees. The sakura will be in full bloom, you understand. It is charmingly delightful to think of—and oh! we shall very greatly enjoy ourselves at that honourable mi-ai." And she clapped her hands together with tinkling laughter of delight which grew more mischievously merry at sight of Hana's blank stare of amazement.

But Hana shook her head.

Truly love—the love of which she had dreamed on the lonely hillside and in the peaceful temple garden of Tsumura was quite, quite different from that which she was learning to know about in the great world beyond.

CHAPTER XXII

BACK TO THE TEMPLE

A BLAZE of pink and white blossoms—and beyond, rising above those soft billowy masses of bloom, the plain wooden building of a Shinto temple. A flight of moss-grown steps led up to the interior of the temple itself, whilst a flock of pigeons strutted, preening themselves, in the sunshine of the court without. Close to the steps, too, stood wooden cages, against the bars of which were fastened numberless tiny paper prayers, bought from the priest and thus offered to the idols whose squatting figures could be seen through the grating. The two ugly little deities in the nearer case were the Ni-o, or Honourable Two, and in their case the paper prayer had to be chewed first by the devout Shintoist and spat through the bars in the hope of its sticking to the idols' august persons; when the worshipper might depart with the knowledge that his prayer was heard.

Just inside the temple itself was the washing-place where the people purified before praying. After washing the worshipper must strike a bell with a bamboo pole, thus invoking whatever god he wishes to address his prayer to, then claps his hands, throws his offering of money into a wooden trunk near, and after rubbing his knees devoutly may commence his prayer.

The temple grounds themselves are regarded as one of the most popular rendezvous for any social gathering or festivity—especially for the ceremony of betrothal or mi-ai—when the contracting parties meet—for the first time perhaps—for their "glance meeting," or "first seeing," the fête usually partaking of the nature of a family picnic.

And the festival of the sakura, or cherry blossom, is ever a favourite one for the "first seeing" of lovers.

Many a time had such happy gatherings been held in the old temple grounds at Tsumura—laughing little mousmé and their eager lovers trooping up the hillside to spend the long hours of spring sunshine under a canopy of pink and white.

No wonder Kieki San thought deep thoughts of the past and future as he watched those laughing throngs—again and again, for love and song are like the sunshine; but sunshine fades at last, and nights are long. So old Kieki moralized, dreaming his strange dreams as he looked out towards the far horizon; but to-day he sighed, for it was Miyo San's mi-ai with Colonel Yamaki that would be held here under the cherry blossoms later in the day—and Hana San the bird-maiden had come back to the shrine with a broken heart.

Up the hill to the cherry orchards toiled a man dragging wearily between the shafts of a dilapidated 'ricksha; he did not wear the ordinary coolie's dress, but that of one of the Guides' Corps with fur-edged cap drawn closely over his brow.

He had the appearance of a man who, suddenly

awaking, can scarcely credit the fact that he is alive.

Yet Suki was very much alive, and, at the present moment, very tired and thirsty with aching muscles and bowed back—small wonder for that either, since in the 'ricksha, the personification of a tragedy queen, sat Mitsu.

"Stop!" cried the latter, with a gasp. "This is Tsumura. There's the temple where we first found Hana, over there—don't you see, Suki? Oh, of course you don't, stupid, for you are miserably looking the wrong way!—that's the General's park where they've gathered the orphans! I do hope I find my little lost lamb." She began to snuffle loudly.

Suki halted, one shaft balanced against his hip.

"I'll go back and look for the little bleater—when I've found Hashimoto," he replied, whilst a slow grin overspread his face at sight of his woe-begone better half.

Mitsu mopped her eyes with the sleeve of her yellow silk kimono. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she scolded, between sobs which might better be described as snorts. "To stand there laughing at me after jolting me all night over ruts and ditches, and dragging me through every black-thorn hedge and cactus bush between here and Tokyo, and—and losing your way at every turn of the road, and—and——"

Suki straightened himself suddenly and down went the shafts of the 'ricksha with a crash. Out tumbled Mitsu headlong, emitting woeful howls.

"Oh—oh!" she groaned; "you—you've nearly

made me bite my tongue out." She held her injured member tenderly between thumb and finger.

But Suki was busy pondering—far too busy to bestow sympathy.

"No luck," he grunted; "it won't come off."

Mitsu's lamentations increased under this heartless callousness to her pain.

"You've shaken me to jelly. I'm black and blue all over. I—I do hope you won't do any more earthquakes."

Suki frowned. "*Do* any more earthquakes?" he inquired.

"It's no use pretending," retorted Mitsu; "you know you foretold it to Hashimoto."

"I?" Suki stared, then laughed. "Pah!" he scoffed, "that was merely a coincidence."

But Mitsu had a grievance—not only one either, but many, and there was no way of lightening the burden of her wrongs but by giving voice to them.

"I don't know what that *is*," she whined; "but you're always having them. First you won't let any one know we are married and tear my adorably beautiful baby from my tender arms—then you set Hashimoto to make love to me—then you go and get killed. Then you come back from the dead to upset me and make me commit bigamy. And finally you topple down my tea-house at the very moment when I was expecting my honourable and adoring child home to my motherly arms—in fact, for all I know its lovely and innocent limbs may be lying crushed and mangled beneath the ruins of my tea-house, whilst you—its father——"

"Hush, hush, hush!" adjured Suki, raising his

hand impressively. "You say *your* tea-house? Honourably permit, I thought it was Hashimoto's—and bought with *our* savings too!"

Mitsu seated herself heavily on one of the shafts of the 'ricksha, which, however, complained so ominously beneath her weight that she was obliged to collapse gracefully on to the mossy ground at the foot of a cherry-tree.

"Oh, you're starting again about the money!" she scolded. "You're always grumbling! I will say this for Hashimoto, *he* never complained of my talking. By the way, I wonder if Hashi has got the baby—no remains of *him* were to be discovered under the tea-house, and the nurse described having given the precious darling to some one very greatly answering to his honourable description."

Suki nodded. "Then *that's* all right," he said cheerfully. "Hashimoto may have many souls, but there's only one body of his pattern on this honourable earth. I expect he has the baby—and the money. That's why I'm so particularly anxious to know whether he is quite safe, you know. Of course Hashimoto is my friend. I hope nothing horrible has happened to him, and he is perfectly welcome to all my share in the tea-house if I can only get hold of the baby and the money he got for Hana. I'll go and see presently whether he's turned up at this old tea-house. Meantime, Mitsu, remember what I told you. Forget that I'm your husband. You don't know me."

Mitsu gave a groan, and dived for her fan in the deep folds of her obi.

"Don't I know all about that!" she retorted

querulously. "When we were here before you always would insist on passing yourself off as a single man—talking to girls and pretending it was all because you wanted to find a nice little wife for Hashimoto. Plum Blossom!" She hurled the last name forth with unexpected violence.

Suki smiled, stroking his chin. "Dear little Umé," he murmured; "what a nice, innocent child it was. Just the wife for—Hashimoto."

Mitsu tossed her head scornfully.

"Hashimoto indeed!" she flared. "Poor, dear innocent! But I know now that he had always better taste than to run after the hussies *you* used to talk to."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Suki, swaying himself gently to and fro. "Very well, then. If you should see him while I'm away remember that you're *his* wife. He'll never part with that thirty thousand yen if he knows I'm your husband. But if he thinks that you're his wife, he'll gladly give double the money to get rid of you."

"I don't know so much about that," sniffed Mitsu angrily. "I'm sure we got on very well together. He was a good deal kinder and—and—and far more respectful than you are."

Suki clenched his fists—if he didn't laugh he found himself perilously near to losing his temper—quite a rare occurrence with this genial promoter of other people's happiness—though there was excellent excuse for him just now, for he was aching in every limb, his throat was as dry as a sand dune, and he was worried over the loss of his baby and the money which undoubtedly should have been his.

"Oh, Lord of hell!" he groaned. "To think there isn't a blessed curse-word in all the language of Japan."

Mitsu smiled. The occasions when she could rouse Suki to this vindictive mood were so rare that they proved quite pleasantly exciting when they arrived.

"You certainly found some words of very inferior quality when you tumbled over the pig," she said aggravatingly. "I'm sure Hashimoto never used to talk like that in front of *his* wife when——"

Suki seized up the shafts of the empty 'ricksha and shook them—very much as he would have liked to shake Mitsu had he dared.

"Hashimoto again!" he growled. "I shall go mad! If I can only lay my hands on the lamentable old idiot and get my baby and my money back he is welcome to keep you! Remember!"—he gave the 'ricksha a furious push forward down the hill—"I am *not* your husband."

Mitsu looked after his retreating figure and began to laugh softly to herself, rubbing plump hands with a well-satisfied air. "He's always had his own way up to now—and a little contradiction does him good," she thought. "There's nothing like a spice of jealousy to keep a man dangling at your side, and if you've had any experience—like I've had—it's perfectly easy to manage without tragedy. That's the best of a good geisha-training. *How* the men did fight for my smile, to be sure. And it would be just the same now—if I dared do it. But of course Suki is not to be relied on like that. If he once begins to get jealous it boils—and boils

—and boils till the gods only know what's going to come of it! And now I shall just go down the hill and across to the General's park to see if my little cherry blossom has—— Oh! Miyo-ko-San!"

She jumped up kowtowing to the General's daughter, who came dancing along, gay as a butterfly, singing a merry little tune to the infinite delight of a small, black-eyed, shaven-crowned baby, whose wondering face peeped drolly over her shoulder, with that questioning expression of wonder which all Japanese babies possess in common.

Behind Miyo came half-a-score young village girls, each with a black-eyed, shaven-crowned baby tucked away in her haori.

Whatever the babies may have had reason to think of their destitute and deserted state there was no doubt that their possession caused much delight and amusement to their self-constituted mammas.

"Ah, Mitsu," said Miyo kindly, as she paused in her dancing to look down at the dust-covered, dishevelled figure of the unfortunate mistress of geisha. "I'm glad to see you alive and well. Where's your husband?"

"I haven't got a husband," said Mitsu, with conviction.

Miyo looked shocked. "The lamentable disaster," she explained. "Is poor Hashimoto really——"

Mitsu spread out her fat hands. "*Oh, him?*" she interrupted, "I thought you meant my other husband."

Miyo laughed, the dimple flashing in and out of

a smooth pink cheek. Mitsu always had amused her, but the earthquake seemed to have made her funnier than ever.

"Your *other?*" she questioned. "Why, how many have you?"

"No, honourably permit, I forgot. At least, of course, I've lost Hashimoto and the baby and——"

Miyo laughed more than ever. "The baby?" she echoed; "but I did not know you had a baby. Aren't you rather mixing things up? It's quite natural, I'm sure, and everybody seems topsy-turvy in their minds to-day. But your baby—is it, do you think, any of these?"

Little imps of mischief danced in her blue eyes, as she peeped up to encounter the solemnly unconcerned stare of the baby on her back.

But Mitsu took the matter quite seriously. She stood the village girls all in a row and made a close examination of each small face which peeped solemnly over their shoulders.

To an uninitiated observer all the babies looked exactly the same, with quaint, gutta-percha little features of uniform yellow colour, black eyes and a fringe of hair; but Mitsu shook her head vigorously.

"No," she said, "mine was prettier than any of these."

Miyo tried to look sympathetic, but to tell the truth she was inclined to think Mitsu's baby was a myth.

"Go up to the house," she suggested; "you'll find Hana there with some more, perhaps yours is amongst them."

Mitsu sighed heavily. "I do hope I find it," she said. "It was such a sweet little thing, and you couldn't mistake it for any other if you heard it say 'Goo-goo.'"

"Of course not," agreed Miyo; but to herself she said—

"Poor Mitsu! The horrible old earthquake has evidently turned *her* brain so very topsy-turvy that I doubt whether it ever comes straight again!"

CHAPTER XXIII

HASHIMOTO GOES IN FOR LUXURIES

UNDER a flowering hawthorn-tree a man was stooping—very carefully—to deposit a bundle in a purloined perambulator. A mysterious-looking bundle of which he seemed more than half afraid.

However, it lay quite still, and did not show any signs of spontaneous combustion such as its owner appeared to have been dreading. When it was firmly fixed the man stood up and mopped his forehead.

"What a night!" he groaned. "What a lamentable experience for a miserably clever man like myself! Talk of earth dragons! I'd almost rather see one wagging its tail at me than spend another night carrying about a thing like that which wags all its arms and legs at once! I wonder my brain's not split by its yells!"

Round a corner of the road came a second figure in the dress worn by men of the Guides' Corps; but he no longer drew a dilapidated 'ricksha, nor was he thirsty any more. On the whole Suki was feeling better than when he left Mitsu under the cherry-tree; but when he came in sight of the man mopping his forehead and nervously eyeing a perambulator, his heart positively overflowed with the milk of human kindness.

"Hashimoto!" he cried joyfully. "At last! My dear, dear friend, I can't tell you what delight this never-to-be-forgotten meeting gives me."

But Hashimoto evinced signs of nervous uneasiness. Drawing back, he laid his finger on his lips, glancing anxiously towards the bundle.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Don't rouse it."

Suki grinned delightedly—he had seen a row of five brown little toes peeping out from beneath the bundle.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Don't rouse it!" implored Hashimoto in a panic. "The devil has cursed me with an imp."

Suki chuckled.

The baby was safe after all! and half of his feared misgivings were at an end.

"S'ush!" cried Hashimoto, gripping his arm, "I've got a baby."

Suki looked politely blank.

"Exactly," went on Hashimoto excitedly. "You're not more surprised than I was. As you know, I got married the day before yesterday—in the morning. In the afternoon, after I met you, a girl comes into the tea-house, and she says to me, 'Where's the honourable Mitsu?' 'What do you want?' I reply, 'I'm her husband.' And without more ado she plumps this lamentable imp into my arms. I thought something must be wrong, because immediately afterwards the earthquake happened."

Suki, regardless of remonstrance, had unfolded the outer wrapping of the bundle, and was fondly regarding what happened to be the exact replica of

"HERE'S AN I. O. U. FOR THREE THOUSAND, HASHIMOTO"

"HOW DARE YOU SAY THAT *I* HAVE A TEMPER?"

the eleven other yellow-faced, black-eyed babies that Miyo-ko-San had under her charge.

"He's a handsome little chap," he murmured rapturously.

Hashimoto looked down in disgust on his unconscious tormentor. "You call it handsome?" he groaned. "I call it an evil face—a sort of a cross between an ostrich egg and a cod-fish. The crafty little imp! It's only pretending to be asleep! I'd like to—like to——"

He dropped on his knees beside Suki, clenching his fist as though itching to further flatten the baby's already flat face.

"What are you going to do?" cried Suki angrily. "Would you strike the child?"

"Strike it," whispered Hashimoto in a voice weak with passion. "I'd like to kill it. You don't know what the little viper's done to me. It's the first time it's been quiet since the earthquake. It carried on so I nearly threw it in the river!"

Suki threw himself back on his heels with a spring.

"What?" he cried, "throw my child—you—you—— Er—did you think it was a crocodile?"

"Well, it looked as if it wanted a bath," explained Hashimoto. "So I found a bit of soap and started washing it. But it sat up and barked at me. Oh, you black-hearted little cormorant!"

"I expect he's hungry," hazarded Suki pityingly.

"Not it. I tried it with some raw fish and boiled egg, and it turned black in the face with temper!"

"Raw fish!" exclaimed Suki indignantly. "Did you think you were feeding sea-lions?"

"When I think of all the misery it's made me suffer," went on Hashimoto, growing more and more eloquent over his vividly pictured torments, "I feel as if I could——"

Again his clenched fist hovered perilously near the placid, putty-featured face.

It was more than paternal instinct could stand. Forgetful of possibly broken slumbers, Suki snatched up the bundle and cradled it in his arms.

"Honourably permit," said he. "I hate to interfere in other people's troubles, but you don't understand the way to treat this little cherub. Look! He's got hold of my finger."

Hashimoto snapped his lips firmly.

"I'll soon make it leave go."

Suki backed, cuddling the child closer to him.

"Don't you touch," he commanded. "You've no idea how pleasant it is."

Hashimoto stared. "Is it?" he asked wonderingly.

"I'll relieve you of this miserable incubus," said Suki airily as he moved away.

Hashimoto wiped his face with his sleeve.

"Honourable gratitude," he replied, "I accept."

"Of course I shall want paying," said Suki cheerfully.

Hashimoto rubbed his head. "Eh?" he demanded.

"Children," went on Suki gravely, "are expensive luxuries."

"Luxuries, are they?"

"Oh yes."

Hashimoto held out his arms. "Well, perhaps I'd better give it another chance. It's no use giving it away if it's any good."

Suki began to sidle off down the road. Hashimoto followed him.

"What sort of luxury will he be?" asked Hashimoto, always ready to solve a problem.

Suki sighed rapturously. "Ah, the comfort of pushing his dirty little fingers out of your dishes when you're eating, and out of your eye when you're trying to sleep," he murmured.

"It doesn't sound very entrancing," said Hashimoto cautiously. "But of course there must be something in it, or people wouldn't have them."

"There's a *lot* in it," Suki answered him eagerly. "Think of his little illnesses. He'll have whooping cough; it'll be your privilege to sit and listen to him all day, and walk about with him on the cold floor all night!"

Hashimoto nodded. "That's another of the advantages?" he asked.

"Precisely. Then he'll have measles, and the spots will come out all over you."

"Over me?"

"Precisely. These are only a few of the little things. There are heaps of others. Of course you have to pay for them. But what matter as long as you have strength and health—and brain to work for the little angel?"

Hashimoto stroked his chin. "How much would

it cost to get rid of him?" he asked. "And how much would it cost to keep him?"

Suki smiled pensively. "To get rid of him merely thirty thousand yen—just for his board," he observed. "All extras, including chopsticks, thrown in. To keep him it will cost you ten times that in a year. Clothes and toys——"

"Ten times that?" roared Hashimoto. "Look here, Suki, let me have my way and drop him quietly in the nearest lake without saying anything about it."

Suki shook his head. "Mitsu might honourably object," he said. "And it is not like a daughter. It's a son, Hashimoto. The gift of the gods. You don't want the Earth-dragon to be up to his tricks again?"

"It's really very dreadful," groaned Hashimoto. "What do you really think would please every one best?"

"Well," said Suki. "Of course, being a fortune-teller, I've learnt to see farther into the future than most people, and my advice is to take a good offer and be thankful for it."

"But where *is* the good offer?" asked Hashimoto. "I'm sure I'm glad enough to take anything that is offered—excepting wives and babies. I've had enough of them at present."

"Give me thirty thousand yen and the baby," said Suki briskly, "and you shan't see anything more of either of them. Then you can start all over again quite nicely."

"That is honourably true," agreed Hashimoto with the air of a philosopher; "but I haven't got

thirty thousand yen. I haven't got a single sen!"

Suki looked incredulous. "What about the money Colonel Yamaki paid you for Hana's indentures?" he asked solemnly.

Hashimoto shook his head. "Almost entirely gone," he replied. "Lost in earthquake. That is the most miserable misfortune. Money, tea-house —er—Mitsu—all gone in a night, and nothing but an evil-faced imp left in their place. It is lamentably to be regretted."

But Suki had sunk on to the nearest bank with the baby in his arms.

This was the most calamitous misfortune of the whole catastrophe.

CHAPTER XXIV

MIYO MAKES UP HER MIND

Over the distant paddy fields the sun was blazing down—but in the temple court, shaded by the pink blossoms of the cherry-trees and the darker canopy of pines, the air was cool and fragrant.

A soft flutter of wings, as the pigeons, rising in a flock from the dome-like roof of the temple, circled through the air to come softly swooping down—between the intervening branches so daintily blossom-laden—and alight at the feet and on the shoulders of the young mousmé standing there.

It was Hana San, dressed in her soft grey kimono, her sweet young face raised to the arching boughs of the sakura above her, whilst she welcomed her old pets with gentle, echoing coos in response to their fluttering adoration.

The sacred beans were scattered around, but one or two of the tamest of her favourites came to accept their food from her hands, cooing their thanks with deep, vibrant notes. Hana San smiled. Already the quiet spell of the place shed its peace upon her.

She could breathe more freely in this sheltered spot, haunted by the ghosts of the noble dead. She had no fear of ghosts. Ah no! It was only the living who had made her afraid.

She sighed, even as she smiled, watching the birds flutter back to their home under the eaves.

She was alone—and, save for the clear, sweet echo of the temple bell, struck by some devout worshipper within the hillside shrine, no sound broke the quiet hush of dreaming Nature.

But Hana dared not dream—she must not even think to-day—the wound at her heart was too new—too cruel. She shrank from the vaguest touch of memory's magic wand.

It was here—only last year—that Fujiwara had found her, and they had spelt through the alphabet of Love together, finding a new joy with every new letter which went to write the wondrous word.

Like happy children, they had laughed at their own discovery—and then grown silent, looking with awestruck eyes into the heart of a great mystery. Had not Love's white robes touched even the far, mysterious shores which lay beyond death itself? . . .

And her lover had said nothing should ever part them—yet had been the first to cry his "Sayonara" because he doubted her woman's truth and loyalty.

Her dark head was bowed low as again the temple bell rang out, its sweet note reminding her of the old dreams—the hopes now dead—the joy crushed and faded as last year's sakura.

Yet this year the sakura bloomed again. Was it possible that hope, joy—aye! Love itself could revive after the wintry blast of doubt, distrust and renunciation?

The suggestion came suddenly to her—like the

refreshing breath of springtide itself, even as she heard Miyo's voice calling to her.

There was no black-eyed baby on Miyo's back now, and the simple kimono of the morning had been replaced by a blue one of richer design and broideries.

Hana remembered, with a stab of pity at her heart, that this was the day of Miyo's "glance-meeting" with Colonel Yamaki.

Not that the thought of the hateful mi-ai seemed to depress the little lady in question, for she came dancing up, her face wreathed in smiles.

Had Hana looked more closely she would have seen a soldier's uniform lurking amongst the pine-trees—a fact which Miyo had already become cognizant of.

"The last of my little family has gone!" cried she, as she came running to meet Hana. "One of the mothers was so grateful she gave me these beads."

Hana glanced at the beads—and then beyond. Makei had come boldly out from the shadow of the pines and stood bowing in the hope of attracting attention.

"I don't wonder," Hana said, answering Miyo's words a little abstractedly. "You have been so good to the little darlings. But—" and she pointed shyly towards Makei—"there is some one else claiming your kindness. Love craves for love. Speak to him."

Miyo laughed, twirling the daintiest of parasols.

"You are a nice teacher," she mocked. "Why don't you practise what you preach?"

But Hana turned quickly away. "Miyo, Miyo, you don't know what you are asking," she said sadly.

Miyo stopped twirling her parasol, and, instead, twirled herself, coming thereby face to face with the bowing and quite meekly deferential Makei.

"Honourably permit," murmured the young man, in the shamefaced manner of one who wishes to eat his portion of humble-pie at a gulp. "But I—wished to say—I think—I believe I was wrong just now."

"No," said Miyo emphatically, "Hana was wrong. It is a *woman's* duty to give way."

She spoke with a magnanimity which had the effect of rendering Makei still more humble. Had Miyo already had time to study the three obediences?

"But—this is so sudden!" he stammered. "Do you mean that you will give way to your father if—if he commands you to marry Colonel Yamaki?"

Miyo tilted her chin and twirled her parasol very fast indeed.

"No, no, no," she repeated hastily. "Fathers have nothing to do with it."

Makei looked thoughtful. "But," he murmured apologetically, "to whom *should* a woman, then, give way?"

Miyo stamped her foot. "How dull you are! To the man who loves her, of course."

Makei's whole face shone with joy. "Do you mean that?" he asked. "Is there really any hope for me?"

A spice of the old mischievous teasing gleamed in blue eyes.

"None, absolutely none," declared Miyo.

Makei turned sorrowfully away.

"Because I have made up my mind to take you," she added gaily.

"What?"

Makei's eagerness was undisguised—he was quite abject in his suing for crumbs of favour.

"Yes," said Miyo, "there is no hope of escape for you. You saved my life, so I'm going to save yours. If I didn't take you, you'd get killed one of these days trying to save some other girl's life. So I shan't risk it."

Makei was overcome with his good fortune. "Oh, Miyo," he gasped, "I was afraid you thought I wasn't good enough for you."

"You're not," replied Miyo calmly. "But you're much too good to waste on any other girl."

Makei laughed—his souls were overflowing with happiness—and he was beginning to hope Miyo would allow him to give her more lessons in European customs on the spot. That dimple—elusive, provoking, wholly delightful—must be studied from. But Miyo prevented closer scrutiny of an elusive charm by bringing her little parasol down between her face and its admirer.

"Honourably please," she murmured—and of course had to peep at him round the corner of her shield. "I make it a rule never to conduct my love affairs before company. Sh—sh—Hana is coming back. I want you to talk to her about Fujiwara."

Hana had indeed returned; she had been pluck-

ing lilies, tall, white and pure-looking, which grew under the shelter of the pines. The lily of forgetfulness was, she told herself, the only flower which she had the right to pluck now; but the sight of Makei's beaming face set her thoughts in a happier strain. She must not be so selfish as only to be brooding over her own lamentable griefs. These others—these gay, inconsequent children, who quarrelled and made friends a dozen times a day, claimed her sympathy in their happiness.

So Hana smiled, seeing them together, and reading a wonderful little secret in Miyo's blue eyes.

"Ah," she said to Makei, "I can guess what has happened. The black clouds have vanished from your face!"

She slipped her arm round Miyo as she spoke, kissing her tenderly. It was good to find so much joy left after all in this world which had appeared so grey and cheerless.

"Yes, yes," cried Makei excitedly. "Banzai! It is all right now. I must go and tell Fujiwara. It will cheer him up."

Of course this was what Miyo wanted him to say, though he had not the ghost of an intention of letting that dimple out of his sight for the present—his happiness in the prospect of its rightful possession was too new, and—to tell the truth—so unstable! If he did not follow up Miyo's promise by a lesson in Suki's art of love-making, she might change her mind.

"Fujiwara?" murmured Hana, looking down at the lilies in her hand. "He is unhappy?"

"Of course," said Makei impatiently. "He

has thrown up his commission and is leaving Japan."

A low cry broke from the little mousmé's lips.

"Going away?" she faltered—and the hands that held the white blossoms trembled. "He is going away? Why?"

Makei shrugged his shoulders. Deeply though he loved Fujiwara, he did not feel particularly interested in his concerns at the present moment. And what a delightful, dainty, perfect little blossom of loveliness Miyo San made as she stood there, laughing at him so gaily, with a fair head framed in the blue-and-white background of a paper parasol.

"He won't tell anybody," he answered abruptly.

"Unless," added Miyo, closing her parasol and taking hold of Hana's sleeve, "you asked him."

But Hana only shook her head, whilst a tear splashed down on her lilies.

Then—afraid, perhaps, that Miyo or Makei would urge her further; afraid, almost, of their sympathy, from which her sensitive nature shrank in that moment of deep suffering—she made feverish haste to change the conversation.

"Now that you and Makei San are agreed, you will not go to the glance-meeting with Colonel Yamaki?" she asked.

Miyo gripped Makei's hand firmly. Behind them, at the head of a hill-path close to the cherry orchard, stood Fujiwara himself.

But she gave Hana no inkling of the fact, answering gaily, whilst her busy little brain schemed hard to think of some plan to bring these two lamentably foolish lovers to a better understanding.

"My glance-meeting?" she questioned, signal-

ling to Makei to be in readiness to obey orders. "Oh, I wouldn't miss it on any account. I am expecting to make a great impression on Colonel Yamaki."

She was fingering the long string of beads given her by one of the grateful mothers whose baby had got "mislaid" in the earthquake.

Suddenly—quite by accident, of course!—the string snapped, and the beads went rolling in all directions.

"Oh, my beads! my pretty beads!" she cried in well-assumed dismay.

Hana laid aside her flowers and stooped to help pick them up.

Her back was towards the approaching Fujiwara.

Makei, in obedience to Miyo's gesture, had already reached the steps of the temple.

"Let me see," said Miyo, making great pretence to be engrossed in her bead-gathering, "we were talking of Fujiwara, were we not? It seems a pity, Hana, that he should leave Japan without even knowing you sold yourself to Mitsu to pay his debt. He has at present no idea that you became a geisha for his sake."

"How could I tell him?" asked Hana piteously, and never noticed that Miyo, in hurrying after a bead that had rolled to some distance, had tiptoed away altogether to join Makei. "It may be, little Miyo, if I saw him again I could not refrain from speaking out of the depths of my heart the thoughts that I bear to him. But I never shall see him again —never. He hates and despises me. He—he has gone out of my life altogether."

"Hana!"

Miyo and Makei were already half way down the hill. To them the spring day was at perfection—for in the finding of their own love they had not forgotten those others who had suffered as they had not been called to do yet.

And suffering seemed a very, very long way from the happy children who went down the hill-side together, whispering in each other's ears the secrets which they were sure had never, never been discovered by any one else in the wide world before.

But Hana San had risen at the sound of her own name, and all Miyo's pretty beads went rolling away amongst the mosses which grew so thickly under the cherry-trees.

"Captain Fujiwara," she whispered, and swayed as though she must fall in the first shock of surprise and wonder.

But already he was by her side and had taken both cold little hands in his.

"Hana! Hana San!" he cried passionately. "Oh! I have been blind and mad. Blind and mad. Can you ever forgive those cruel words I spoke to you before?"

She closed her eyes as if the light dazzled them.

"Forgive?" she echoed. "You—ask me to forgive?"

High above the old Shinto temple the pigeons circled, fluttering—white and grey wings against the blue sky.

And the glory of the sakura blooms canopied those two who stood in the temple court.

Hana San opened her eyes and looked straight up into the face of the man who bent over her.

"Every moment since you left my sight I have longed for your return," she whispered, "as eagerly as the birds under the eaves wait for morning."

"Then you forgive? It is possible?"

She smiled—the slow, rare smile of one who can scarcely believe her own happiness.

"It is not for me to speak of forgiveness," she replied, "to one so far above me, but only to beg the exceeding favour of being found not hateful."

"Hateful?" Fujiwara had drawn her close to him, his dark head bent to look yet deeper into the dark eyes which had haunted him these many months, but of which he had thought so despairingly for the last two terrible days. "Hateful?" he repeated. "You, who have drawn all loveliness in form and soul from the flowers whose name you bear? Ah, Hana! the agony since I left you in that evil hour! Yes, you do well to shudder—remembering it—but your heart does not grow sick with shame as does mine. I—who spoke those unforgivable words—who dared to accuse one whose noble soul had made offering of all it possessed for my sake. Yes—I heard Miyo's words—and as in a scroll of living fire I learned the truth. And yet you will forgive one who sinned so deeply by the failure of his faith?"

"Forgive?" echoed Hana. "Ah, Fujiwara!—I love."

There was silence in the temple court. Unnoticed, the worshipper quitted the shrine and passed down the hillside without so much as seeing the two who stood together under the cherry blossoms in the joy of perfect understanding.

Presently Fujiwara broke the spell in which Hana's dream had been one of dazzling beauty—the fairer because of the dark despair preceding it.

"How I have longed for you!" he said softly, as he drew her head on to his shoulder. "Not a wind has breathed on me but whispered your name; not a flower that slept beneath the moon but in its fragrance spoke of you."

She smiled up at him, but did not answer. Her happiness was too perfect for speech.

But presently he drew out his pocket-book and showed her a withered aster, brown and faded, which lay between the leaves.

"See," he asked, "do you remember this?"

"The flower of remembrance?" she cried. "You have kept it?"

"Always, always. But now—why, you shall take it back—this flower of remembrance—and give me—the flower of my heart."

CHAPTER XXV

THE FATHER IN POSSESSION

It had been a long and weary tramp back to Tsumura. Suki's arms ached woefully—he had had no idea that a baby could make its bearer's muscles so sore. Never had he felt more really like the "humble hero of Japan," and he was resolved to continue the heroic *rôle* even if his arms broke, for by his side walked Hashimoto—and Hashimoto's designs on that yellow-skinned, black-eyed baby were distinctly harrowing to its loving parent's feelings.

But where was Mitsu? They had wearily climbed up the hill to the temple, where Suki had left her, but she was not there; they searched high and low, whilst Hashimoto drew on a blood-curdling imagination in describing her possible fate.

Suki grew cold all over at the horror of the thought that he might be called on to become father and mother both to the putty-faced baby which he cradled so carefully in his arms.

Then, in a moment of inspiration, he remembered Mitsu's suggestion that her precious lamb might be amongst the mislaid babies whom Miyo-ko-San was taking care of.

Off again he started, more briskly on his way

down-hill, with Hashimoto shuffling alongside in loquacious mood. If he had not been so occupied carrying the baby Suki would have knocked his problem-seeking companion down there and then.

"Where *can* Mitsu be!" he groaned. "There's only one place on earth where you can be sure of finding a woman—and that is where she isn't wanted."

Hashimoto was gingerly poking a long, lean finger into the depths of Suki's bundle.

"After all," he murmured abstractedly, "he's not so bad when you get to know him."

Suki chuckled. "Aha! What did I tell you? My little Uranaisha!"

"Not so much of *your* little Uranaisha, then! Look at his quaint hands. It seems funny his having hands. Just like a human being!"

"What did you expect him to have?" demanded Suki scornfully. "An elephant's trunk?"

"They're soft as butter," gurgled Hashimoto. "Oh—oh! He's got hold of my finger now!"

Suki stopped, and made heroic efforts to release the tiny, clinging fingers.

"Don't be frightened," he urged, "I won't let him hurt you."

But Hashimoto pushed him away. "You mind your own business," he advised. "I'm glad you showed me this. It's a funny feeling—like putting your finger in a calf's mouth."

"Honourably permit," said Suki uneasily. "Take your hand away."

"And make the little cherub cry? Not me! You don't understand what a parent's feelings are."

"Take it away! If he wants a finger he can have a whole bunch of mine."

"What's it got to do with you?" demanded Hashimoto angrily. "It's my baby!"

Suki controlled himself with difficulty. It was his natural instinct to put down the baby and forcibly rouse Hashimoto to a sense of his own inferiority—primarily of muscle.

As it was he bowed politely. "Honourably permit," he retorted, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I'll have to try you with the truth. Condescend to believe this baby is not yours at all."

Hashimoto gaped. "Whose then?" he demanded.

"It is mine," said Suki, bowing again.

Since Hashimoto had lost those thirty thousand yen it did not much matter about concealing or proclaiming the truth.

"You see," he continued seriously, "you never had any brains at all, but only a swimming in the head. This child has one father—and I am *It*."

Hashimoto began to laugh scornfully. "How can you be his father when I married his mother?"

"I married her first."

"You're mad. I've been thinking that a long time," declared Hashimoto, and tried to grab the bundle Suki held clasped to his heart.

Suki promptly backed out of reach. "You're not fit to touch a baby," he said contemptuously.

Hashimoto had turned a dusky red under his yellow skin.

"I tell you it's mine," he whispered hoarsely.

"You leave my baby alone. Ah! here's Mitsu

coming from the General's house. She'll soon settle it."

He started off at a run, closely followed by the indignant Hashimoto.

It certainly was Mitsu who approached, her yellow silk kimono could be seen for a mile off.

"Mitsu!" shouted Suki, "who is the father of my child?"

Mitsu stopped aghast, then made a snatch at the bundle, covering a small, putty-featured countenance with kisses, whilst she gurgled out a hundred absurd endearments. She took not the slightest notice of either of the disputants.

"Mitsu," cried Hashimoto, panting in his haste, "that is my child."

"Am I," demanded Suki fiercely, snatching at a yellow silk sleeve and giving it a tug, "your husband, or am I not?"

Mitsu hugged the child to her heart and began to laugh. Now she had got her baby back she was quite ready to do anything Suki told her, and she remembered how very emphatic he had been on this point.

"Of course you are not," she replied cheerfully, and started crooning again over the bundle.

"What?" roared Suki, falling back a pace.

Hashimoto began to rub his hands. "There you are!" he chortled; "I thought she'd know. You're my wife, aren't you, Mitsu?"

Mitsu nodded. "Of course I am," she said.

"No, no!" shouted Suki; then, as sudden recollection dawned on him, "Ah! I see how it is. Ha! ha! Yes, of course. Now, Mitsu, anata, pull

yourself together. Am I the father of my own child, or am I not? This will settle it."

Mitsu beamed at him, every crease in her fat face broadening with sly knowingness. How well Suki acted his part!

"Of course you are not," she obediently replied.

Suki collapsed.

Was ever such a fool as Mitsu?

So occupied had they all been in their dispute that they had not noticed the approach of General Okubo with Colonel Yamaki by his side. They were on their way to prepare for the mi-ai in the temple grounds.

"What's the matter here?" demanded the General, stopping short at sight of these extraordinary looking wranglers who almost blocked the roadway of his own park.

Suki bowed low, pulling off his fur-edged cap.

"Superiority!" he said humbly. "Condescend to remember me: Suki the Guide. Your illustrious greatness recruited me here at Tsumura before the war."

"I don't recollect your face," replied the General thoughtfully. "But I remember the name. Let me think. Ah! of course. Suki is dead."

Suki stared aghast. "What, Superiority?" he murmured; then, brightening visibly, he turned to Yamaki. "*You* remember me, sir?" he said confidently.

Yamaki's face darkened in a scowl—he looked somewhat uneasy.

"No," he replied abruptly.

"Superiority!" urged Suki in injured tones,

"surely you must remember my taking you back to your quarters on the night when Captain Fujiwara took the Eastern Fort against——"

The General was listening now—listening in spite of all Yamaki's vain attempts to silence the speaker.

"What is this?—what is this?" he demanded excitedly.

Yamaki tried to draw him away. "Surely, General," he said, trying to scoff the matter aside, "the fellow is too preposterous. *I don't know him.*"

But the General would not be led off so cavalierly. He was evidently much perturbed at Suki's speech, which had been delivered with so much ingenuous frankness.

"He claims you as his wife," he said to Mitsu. "Is he your husband?"

Mitsu looked from one to the other in uncertainty. What *did* Suki really mean her to say? He had been so very urgent about not being her husband.

"Ye-o-n-o, Superiority," she stammered.

"Of course not," interrupted Hashimoto emphatically. "I married her yesterday. Why! *He* helped me to marry her!"

"Yes," explained poor Suki, who was growing more and more confused. "I married her to him not knowing she was my wife—at least not knowing he was my husband—I mean——"

Hashimoto thrust himself forward, smiling benignly. "You must excuse him, Superiority," he said. "He's had an earthquake. Come on, Mitsu."

"But you're not taking my baby," cried Suki, making a grab at the bundle in Mitsu's arms.

The General looked perplexed. "Is this his child?" he asked.

But Hashimoto had quite solved that problem. "How can it be when I'm its mother's husband?" he asked triumphantly. "Come on, Mitsu!"

Suki was nearly in tears. "Superiority," he groaned, "condescend to believe that that *is* my baby. His wife's my mother—that is to say, I married that baby before Hashimoto had a mother —I mean—oh!—my senses are lamentably saying good-bye to me."

"You evidently don't know what you are talking about," replied the General severely. "You have been drinking. Go away. Do you hear? Go away."

Suki turned despairingly to follow Hashimoto and Mitsu, who had already reached the road. He certainly *must* make haste to reclaim that precious baby. He also felt murderously inclined towards Hashimoto.

The General watched the retreating figure thoughtfully.

"Have you ever seen him before, Yamaki?" he asked.

Yamaki smiled as he bowed. "Never, General," he replied suavely.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MI-AI

THE guests were assembled under the flowering cherry-trees which surrounded the ancient temple.

A gay, laughter-making throng, revelling in the beauty and sunshine around.

It was the mi-ai of O Miyo-ko-San and quite an illustrious event; for was not the prospective husband the hero of Port Arthur? whilst the bride-elect was no other than the daughter of General Okubo, with whose fame all Japan was ringing.

Yamaki, smiling and bowing, was receiving every one's congratulations, and the General was anxiously awaiting the arrival of his daughter, who was unaccountably late.

"She ought to be here," he was saying to one of his guests, when two slim figures were seen approaching through the trees.

Hana San was leading the veiled figure of little Miyo by the hand.

Colonel Yamaki turned, smiling pleasantly to greet his bride. He was quite curious to see her for the first time—but——

Suddenly he paused, riveted to the spot where he stood in blank and utter dismay.

Miyo had unveiled and was bowing to him, her bright little face wreathed with smiles of mischief.

"The little geisha!" cried Yamaki, entirely losing his self-possession.

The General, who was standing close by with Makei beside him, started.

"You have met before?" he inquired suspiciously.

Miyo turned to her father, slipping one hand through his arm whilst pointing with the other towards the embarrassed Colonel.

"Yes," she replied, speaking very clearly. "We have met—when this honourable gentleman condescended to explain that he proposed to marry me only to secure my father's influence. You remember, Colonel? I told you that you would find me again and then lose me. And now, honourable sir, you have lost me."

Yamaki's face was livid; but he had nothing to say. What excuse could he make against the denunciation of this bewitching and indignant little lady, who stood before him in her embroidered kimono and obi, with flushed cheeks and scathing eyes—the personification of an accusing spirit of retribution? Was it indeed possible that the hour of his triumph was to be that of ruin and *dénouement?*

With darkened face, from which the suave smiles had fled, he looked first towards the General—who stood by his daughter's side, the grave suspicion on his fine old face deepening every moment—and then at Makei, who appeared to be in the gayest of spirits, and returned Yamaki's scowl with the most polite salutation.

"Honourably permit, General," said the little

man who had managed to edge a little nearer to Miyo's side, whilst the wondering guests crowded round, "I think I see Captain Fujiwara approaching. I am sure he will have something interesting to say on this august occasion."

He pointed as he spoke to where Captain Fujiwara was seen, coming up the hillside accompanied by Lieutenant Ito, Tanaka and Suki.

The face of the latter was irradiated with an expression of triumphant virtue.

"Superiority," he exclaimed, kowtowing before the astonished General, "condescend to believe me. These honourable gentlemen will tell you I'm not dead."

Tanaka came forward. He did not look at Colonel Yamaki, whose face had grown very pale at sight of him, but he bowed to the General, who returned the salutation stiffly—he knew the editor of the *Tokyo Review* by repute.

"I am able," said Tanaka, with some dignity, "from unquestionable evidence, to identify this man as the writer of the account of Colonel Yamaki's exploit at Port Arthur."

Yamaki flung up his hand with a furious gesture. "He lies!" he cried, entirely forgetting dignity or discretion. "He knows that I was about to discharge him from his employment."

The General frowned. "*You* were about to discharge him?" he asked incredulously. "Then——"

Tanaka interposed. "Colonel Yamaki is quite right, sir," he said. "He threatened to discharge me because I praised Captain Fujiwara, who saved my life. Colonel Yamaki is the proprietor of the *Tokyo Review*."

If a bomb had suddenly exploded in their midst it could not have caused greater amazement to the surrounding company than this startling announcement.

As for Colonel Yamaki, he was the first to realize that the game was up. He had played for a coveted stake—and lost in the very moment of fancied success and security. But here he stood confronted by two unexpected witnesses against him. Suki was alive—Tanaka had been won over to the other side.

"Yamaki," the General was saying gravely, "before your alliance with my daughter can proceed——"

But Yamaki interrupted him. He had succeeded, after a desperate effort, in regaining his sang-froid, and stood facing his successful opponents with a mocking smile on his face. Of course he would have cheerfully murdered Fujiwara, Tanaka and that sniggering little Makei; but as he could not do that, he determined to carry the matter off with the brazen bravado he knew so well how to assume.

After a mocking little salute in Miyo's direction, he turned to her father.

"Thank you, General," he said calmly, "but I have re-considered my proposal. I must decline the honour of an alliance with a young lady who is in the habit of frequenting tea-houses in the costume of a geisha."

And, without awaiting the reply which the General was too astounded to give, he moved quickly away through the wondering crowd of guests, who hastily drew back for him to pass. Yamaki smiled as he noticed how they shrank

from him with doubting and mistrustful glances—these *friends* who, an hour ago, had regarded him in the light of a national hero; but he ground his teeth, cursing in his heart when he had passed out of sight on his way down the hill.

He had tried to ruin Fujiwara—the proud Samurai of whom he had always been so bitterly jealous. And behold! instead of Fujiwara, it was he himself who must leave Japan with slurred name and dishonoured sword. Kieki, the priest, who was standing in the shadow of the pine-trees, saw him pass, but he did not speak to him. Only, when the old man returned to his dreamings, looking, from his favourite standpoint near the hill-top, away over the blue-grey ocean towards the distant horizon, there was a smile on his face and a fresh shadow in the calm inscrutable eyes; for though it was good in Kieki's sight that right should triumph, he could still pity those who could never take their place amongst the honourable dead, but must for ever wander—poor, shamed ghosts—in the darkness of ignominy.

But, on the summit of the hill where the old Shinto temple stood, Yamaki had left a blue sky without a cloud, and happy hearts which thrilled in the golden sunshine of youth and happiness. Miyo was the first to break the silence which fell on the honourable company after Yamaki's departure.

"He is lamentably wicked," she said; "but I do admire his impudence!"

The dimple flashed in her cheek as she looked at Makei.

The General glanced from one to the other. He was very, very perplexed, and secretly not a little pleased at the turn of events.

"What is the meaning of this sneer about the geisha and the tea-house?" he asked.

Hana—a radiant, smiling Hana to-day—stepped forward.

"Honourably permit," she said gently, "that was my fault. She came there to see me."

The General was beginning to understand, and, if he pretended to frown, any anger was belied by the fond twinkling of his eyes as they rested on Miyo's pretty face.

"Then the lovely young girl of distinguished family——" he began.

"Yes, sir," interrupted Makei, taking Miyo's hand and leading her to her father's side. "I think you said something about wanting the help of some bright young rascal to look after her?"

"Silence, boy!" commanded the General; but his voice did not sound nearly so terrible as he meant it to.

Miyo put her little hand on his arm and began coaxing.

"All the honourable guests are waiting for the mi-ai, father," she pleaded. "It would be a shame to disappoint them."

Her father shook his head.

"Makei is a mere boy," he objected.

Miyo laughed mischievously, but there was a tender light in her blue eyes.

"Oh, he'll get older if I take charge of him," she replied. "So you will augustly permit——"

"No, no. We'll talk of this when you are both grown up. That must content you, my Miyo. After all, you are but a child. You must consent to stay and take care of your father a little longer. Makei can prove himself worthy of you in the meantime, and he has certainly made a good beginning. Ah, Fujiwara, my boy, the Court of Inquiry shall be held to-morrow. If you still refuse to speak, these witnesses will."

He pointed towards Tanaka and Suki. The latter writhed his body with the self-satisfaction of a cat which has been stroked the right way. He was feeling very pleased with himself, this "humble hero of Japan"—having established his claim on Mitsu and the baby to the utter discomfiture of Hashimoto, who, minus everything but his superlative brain power, had retired back to the peace of single blessedness with any number of newly suggested problems to solve.

"Certainly, yes, Superiority," said the elated Suki, kowtowing all round. "I'm always most ready to speak the honourable truth."

The General held out his hand and grasped Fujiwara's warmly.

Much as he deplored Yamaki's deception and the narrowness of little Miyo's escape, he greatly rejoiced to find that his high opinion of this young officer, the son of his old friend, was justified after all.

"In the meantime, my boy," he said heartily, "you must accept my many congratulations. But what was the cause of your obstinate silence?"

Fujiwara stepped back, and taking Hana San by the hand led her forward to the General.

"This, sir," he said simply.

And the General, looking from the proud, happy face of the young Samurai to the lovely one beside him, understood. . . .

"So there was a mi-ai after all, you see," said O Miyo San, as she flung both arms round Hana's neck on their return to General Okubo's house. "And no one was disappointed, excepting poor Makei. But, after all, the growing up won't take long now. I shall easily persuade my father as to that. Perhaps, when the sakura blossom next year it will be time. I shall be quite old then, sixteen years. Even older than O Fusa San."

"Certainly," agreed Hana, trying to appear very grave—though the world was too full of sunshine for her to keep the glad smiles long from her lips. "Sixteen is very honourably old."

So they laughed together. Laughed, because youth and love were as good and sweet and fair as sunshine and blossoming cherry-trees.

And, truly enough, when next year the sakura were abloom again in the temple grounds, Miyo San and little Makei held their mi-ai together, and amongst the most honourable guests on that august occasion were Colonel Fujiwara and his wife—Hana San.

It was under the sakura that those two lingered when all the rest of that gay company had gone.

"It was here that first I met you," Fujiwara was saying softly. "The singing-maid of Tsumura. The singing-maid—whose song will always, always echo in my heart."

She raised her face, smiling, looking up through

the mass of pink and white blossoms overhead to where white pigeons circled in the air.

Clear and sweet from within the shrine floated the sound of the temple bell.

Hana San stretched out her hand and placed it in that of her husband.

"Come," she whispered, and thus together they climbed the wooden steps passing into the hushed silence of the shrine beyond.

THE END

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